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Disappointed
Ambition;
or
Wedded
and
Single.



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DISAPPOINTED AMBITION ;

OR,

WEDDED AND SINGLE.

A Tale of the Day.

BY THE AUTHORESS OF "THE WORLD AND THE CLOISTER,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

"The hearts of old gave hands;
But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts."

OTHELLO.

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DISAPPOINTED AMBITION ;
OR,
WEDDED AND SINGLE.

CHAPTER I.

It is a soft, warm morning, in the month of April, 183—, just such sweet mornings as, at that time of the year, are often known in the fair vales of Devon ; and in a pretty and well-furnished villa, in the pleasant village of Dawlish, a coterie of some five or six persons of the softer sex have assembled, to pay their morning calls to the mistress of the house.

But, surely, these ladies are discussing some matter of grave import ; for two or three of the younger of the party, who do not speak, out of deference to the elder ladies, are on the *qui vive*, and long for a break in the conversation of the ancient dames, so that they, too, may have something to say. They are quite ready, these young ladies, to cast a stone at fair Lucy Clifton, whose wedding they have just heard is shortly to take place. For, dear reader, this solemn conclave are sitting in judgment on Lucy ; but, to speak truth, had they her chance of becoming wives, so great is their fear of celibacy, that, with many young ladies of the present time,

these then youthful damsels of the year 183— would have taken the Dissenting husband, for better or worse, as the lapse of time should shew.

Yet, such a case as that of Lucy Clifton's was, after all, an unusual one. She, a girl educated in a Convent School, around whom Catholic influences had seemed to work together for good, for whom an excellent and worthy man in the naval service would have laid all he had at her feet, and lavished on her the whole wealth of the heart's affections could he have won her for his bride, had yet, in defiance of a widowed mother's tears, of the earnest warning of him who had baptised her, and who admonished her of the evils so generally the attendant on unions in which there was no congeniality of sentiment, adding, that her's was a case which, so far from being an exception to the rule, would probably prove more painful than usual in its effects on her future well-being, yet failed to shake her resolve. The *prestige* of a costly wedding, the bridal ring, an elegant mansion in that sweetest of all sweet spots, that gem of the west—far-famed Torquay, with a handsome equipage, and a splendid casket of jewels, glittered before the eyes of the bride-elect, and therefore she *would* not see evil lowering in the distance.

Reuben Ashley had told her she should be left free to the performance of her religious duties; that her children, if she had any, should be brought up members of her own faith—at all events the girls. She was sure he loved her too well to thwart her wishes on such a point. She had *no* money; *he* was so rich, the match was so good, she could not refuse; and again, even if he should want to exert any undue power over her, she knew her duty well, and would follow her religion in spite of him. Such were the arguments with which Lucy strove to calm the apprehensions of her friends,

summing all up with the remark, “A brilliant offer is made me by a man of considerable wealth, and I do not see *why* I should sacrifice all my hopes in life to the foolish fears of my friends.”

But return we to the Misses Harcourt and their visitors. The former ladies were styled old maids by many of those in the small circle in which they moved ; but the giddy, scheming girls around them, all of whom became wives, were not worthy to minister to such women as those whom they derided ; but concerning them we will speak later.

“ Is the affair quite settled,” asked the elder of the sisters, whose retirement had, to her unspeakable regret, been that morning broken in upon by the little bevy of ladies who were burning to communicate the news, no matter to whom, so that they even turned their steps to those sedate, reserved Misses Harcourt.

“ I know but little of Lucy,” she added, “ except that she is a gay and exceedingly beautiful girl ; but I have met her mother frequently at the house of a friend, and, if the marriage is really settled, I am sure she will feel it acutely.”

“ Yes, Miss Harcourt,” exclaimed Bertie Alveston, “ and the worst of all is, it will be worse than those matches generally are ; for Mr. Ashley is a very strict Dissenter, and Deacon of the Independent Meeting which he attends. Mrs. Edwards, the housekeeper, told my maid that he carries things so far, that he will on no account walk out on a Sunday, or the Sabbath, as she termed it. Indeed,” added Bertie, “ I wonder, for my part, what glamour can have been cast over Lucy Clifton to make her refuse that good, worthy Captain Seymour for a plain-looking man, stiff and Puritanical in all his ways, like Deacon Ashley.”

"Bertie, Bertie," said the younger of the Harcourts, while a tear gathered in her soft eye, "I fear it is the glamour of Reuben Ashley's wealth which is cast over our poor Lucy, and invests all the future with a golden tint, which time, alas! will quickly tarnish."

"And what says Miss Ashley to the approaching nuptials," said the elder Miss Harcourt, to another of the gossiping coterie who had that morning invaded her usually quite home? "I should think it not at all improbable that a high-spirited girl of eighteen would be somewhat annoyed at the idea of her father marrying a young woman only six years older than herself."

"Oh," replied one of the ladies, "Esther is kept at school still, for the best of all possible reasons perhaps, though Mrs. Edwards says her papa has some idea of having her home for the wedding, and sending her back again, while he makes the bridal tour. Ah me," she added, with a sigh, "I pity poor Esther with all my heart. Her own mother died but a year since, and now she is to see a stranger in her place, but a little older than herself. Surely Ashley might have looked out for some lady with thirty or forty years over her head, whom his child might at least have regarded as more experienced than herself. This would, in some degree, have lightened the cross he means to put upon her."

"Yes," exclaimed Bertie, "and I can tell you Lucy may find her task rather difficult, too; for Esther is no apathetic, passionless girl, and she has been brought up in accordance with her father's most rigid views. Fire and water may about as soon assimilate as the dispositions of Esther and Lucy."

"And when, too late, Lucy will bewail her error," replied

Amelia Harcourt ; "for such marriages are rarely productive of anything but misery."

And the ladies, having thus relieved themselves of their budget of news, as far as the Misses Harcourt were concerned, they one after another dropped off, to carry their tidings elsewhere—Bertie congratulating herself that *she* was not in the place of Esther Ashley, whom she thought deserving of the greatest commiseration.

CHAPTER II.

It is evening at the Oaklands, just one week after the morning to which we have alluded. In one of the loveliest spots in Torquay was situated the villa residence of Mr. Ashley, the cliff on which it was built overhanging the sea ; a rosy sunset bathed all around in a flood of crimson light, tipping the blue waters of the ocean with the same rich tinge. Everything spoke of opulence and luxury, and the sweetest fragrance from a conservatory, filled with rare exotics, pervaded the apartment in which the wealthy Mr. Ashley reclined on a sumptuous couch, with wines from the choicest vintages placed before him. Something may be, perchance, gathered, as an insight into his character, for he expresses his thoughts half aloud, and murmurs as follows :—

"I have no doubt, my task will be a hard one ; but what then ?—the harder the work the greater the glory, and the Lord will help me to convert my beautiful Papist wife. To humour her, I must, perforce, enter the Mass house to be married ; but when once she is my wife, then—ah, *then*," he added, "won't I, as the head of the house, soon put an end

to her going to Mass and Confession, and, as St. Paul says, 'Wives be'—

"All very well in its way, friend Ashley," said a voice near him; "but I tell you your home will be soon a home of discord and confusion. I warn you again not to marry this Lucy Clifton, whose fair face beguiles you, along with your anxious desire to make a proselyte. Break it all off, man, and take unto yourself another mate, and look around our meeting at the godly, prayerful, and well-disposed young persons, with faces little less fair than that of which you are so enamoured."

Thus spoke the minister, Jabez Hopley, who, gaining admittance to the grounds attached to the house by a little gate, had entered through the open French window, and crossed the room unnoticed by Ashley, so absorbed was he in profound speculation as to how he should manage Lucy, should she prove refractory after she became his wife. Ashley was somewhat excited, notwithstanding the deep respect in which he held Mr. Hopley. Therefore it was that he bit his lips, and tried to look composed, inwardly chafed that his cogitations, unwarily pronounced aloud, had been overheard; and he replied, at the same time rising, handing a chair to his guest, and pushing the wine towards him—

"A foolish habit is that in which I indulge, of expressing my thoughts aloud, my friend; but I have resolved, once for all, on marrying Miss Clifton; and, furthermore, I have determined in my own mind, that, as the Holy Bible says, '*the husband is the head of the wife*', so shall I be master over mine; and, mark me, Mr. Hopley, not many months will Lucy be Mrs. Ashley ere you will see her very meekly accompany me to the Tabernacle. I was but quoting the words of St. Paul when you entered, who enjoins obedience to hus-

bands. I have read the marriage service they use in their Popish Chapels, and these words are used, which forcibly remind the wife of her state of subjection. Her submission I shall scrupulously exact. She marries me with her eyes open, knowing what my principles are. I have promised she shall attend to what she *thinks* her religious duties ; but what then ? She takes me for *better for worse*, and promises to obey me. Now, do you know, I really do not think I shall find it at all a hard task to make Lucy throw aside her faith. Let the first two or three months pass over quietly, *then* we'll see who'll be master," added the Deacon, quietly chuckling, as he tossed off another glass of Madeira.

" Deacon Ashley," said the minister, somewhat angrily, " I considered you the chief light of our Tabernacle ; but I tell you, you are giving no small scandal, and will become a stumbling block to the weak, and, as I have said, your home will be one of discord. This Lucy Clifton marries you for your gold, and her faith, which she puts in jeopardy by becoming your wife, may be more strongly rooted than you imagine. Again I say it, why will you be not advised, and look amongst yourselves for a more fitting mate ? Then there is Esther. Does *she* know who her future step-mother is ? Is *she* aware that she is a Romanist, just six years older than herself ? Oh ! man, man, I pity you from my heart," added Hopley rising from his seat. " What a home you will have, between your grown-up daughter and her youthful Papist step-mother."

" Now, Mr. Hopley, my good friend," exclaimed Ashley, unable longer to restrain his temper, " I respect you very much, but I cannot stand this ; for you know very well that you are angry because I do not choose to wed one of the spinsters of our Tabernacle. With Lucy I shall do as I

please, when she is once my wife ; and as to Esther, she must swallow down her repugnance, and submit, till she leaves her father's house, to be mistress of one of her own. She is as yet ignorant of the approaching change. She has written me from the boarding school that she quite longs for the expiration of the quarter, as she shall then come home for good, and will show me how well she will try to supply her mother's place, by adding in everything to my comfort. Poor Esther," added Ashley, in a musing tone ; "she will be disappointed ; for she will be sent for to be Lucy's bridesmaid, and then go back to school, till we return from our tour on the Continent, when, I warrant you, I will hold both wife and daughter in due subjection. And now, my good friend, let us drop the conversation. Will you walk with me some little way on the road to Babbicombe ? I am this evening expected at Mrs. Clifton's house."

But the minister declined, and bade Reuben Ashley adieu with somewhat wrathful feelings. Indeed he was not very far from wrong in his belief, that in some measure the minister's aversion to the match arose from his desire that he should wed with one of his own five marriageable daughters. Ashley was a shrewd man, with a firm will, to which all who owed him subjection must bow. His former wife had been a weak, submissive woman ; but he reckoned not that he was about to encounter metal of a far sterner kind in his bride-elect, Lucy Clifton.

CHAPTER III.

Some way up the main road, beyond Clapham Common, stands, in all the plentitude of its glory a large, old-fashioned

house, built, perhaps, a hundred and fifty years since, but strangely altered and modernized since then—to wit, its casement windows have all been knocked out, and large sheets of plate glass substituted for those diamond-shaped panes, whilst Venetian blinds of the brightest green are drawn carefully down, to exclude the faintest ray of the sun from penetrating into the apartments, and thereby injuring the carpets and curtains of the Misses Murdoch, the ladies of Minerva Hall. Two huge stone griffins, scarcely less grim than their stately owners, one on either side a high flight of steps, guard, as it were, the approach to that spacious portico, and those steps look almost as spotlessly white as the collars and cuffs of those two antiquated damsels.

Very trimly kept, too, was the stiff-looking garden, with its long, narrow walk leading up to the house, its square lawn, on which not one blade of grass was suffered to grow higher than another, and its hedge of arbutus and laurel trees, all looking as coldly stiff and formal as the Misses Deborah and Martha Murdoch themselves.

But, hark ! merry voices break upon our ear, and we wonder, too, how anything merry can live in so cold an atmosphere as that we are attempting to describe. But come with us, reader, to the garden surrounding the house, or rather the *grounds*, as they were pompously termed.

Here were some twenty young ladies, whose ages might vary from twelve to eighteen years, and downright fashionable boarding-school young damsels were for the greater part these *eleves* of Minerva Hall. In vain may you look for the simplicity and artlessness of youth, for they have already obtained in some degree the self-possession of women of the world, and prate of those things of which they ought still to be ignorant. But not with such as these have we to deal, but

with a beautiful girl who, standing a little apart from the noisy group, holds in her hand a volume of Ariosto, on the pages of which her intelligent countenance is fixed. Suddenly a child runs forward, and, holding up a letter, exclaims :

" See, Miss Ashley, I have a letter for you ; " and a chase then commences, the little truant keeping Esther—for she it was—some few moments out of possession of the coveted letter. At last it is obtained, and now both the younger and elder pupils crowd around the rich Miss Ashley, who is so generous, that when her father sends her presents, which he often does, they never last long, as the larger share is uniformly devoted to her companions.

" What is it about, Esther ? tell us all the news, dear," are words which sound in her ear from all sides, as she peruses her letter. But much her companions marvel at her silence, for Esther says not a word. Something rises in her throat. She wishes to speak, but cannot make the attempt ; for she knows that the large tears are about to gush forth, that the first word will quite unnerve her ; but one tall young lady has been silently gazing over her shoulder, and she reveals the cause of Esther's silence, for she exclaims—

" *Est il possible, ma chere* Esther, do I read aright ? Why, young ladies," she added, addressing the little group around her, " poor Esther's old brute of a father is going to give her a step-mother."

" Nay ; Esther, dear, it cannot be," exclaimed half a dozen voices at the same time. " If I were you I would take care she should not have a very quiet life of it. I wouldn't endure seeing a stranger put in the place of my own mother."

" Hush, hush, all of you," said the poor girl, speaking through her tears ; " this is not right. I must not hear you

speak of my father in this way, for very kind and good he has been to me ; and"—

" You are quite right, Miss Ashley ; perfectly right" said a stately lady who, unobserved, had approached the little group of pitying girls who had gathered around Esther, aggravating instead of soothing her grief, by their mistaken attempt at what they deemed commiseration. " I am glad you do such credit to our teaching as to have answered these young ladies in so prudent a way, and to find you have so just an estimation of your own duty. I, too, have received a letter from your father," continued Miss Murdock, " and I have no doubt that the intelligence I have to communicate will dispel the evident pain with which you have perused your own note ; for Esther, you are to leave us almost immediately, in order to be present at the wedding, and make acquaintance with your new ma'ma, and as soon as all is over, the happiness is to be afforded you of a return hither ; so that you are to spend two years more in this pleasant retirement. Thus, my dear Esther," continued Miss Murcock, " you will at once escape all the anxieties which would have devolved on you, had you been placed at the head of your father's household, and, at the same time, the blessings of two years more afforded you for further progress in your studies and accomplishments."

But the girl still continued silently weeping. She stood in too much awe of the stately preceptress of Minerva Hall, whose cold frigidity of character could never win the love of the warm-hearted, impulsive Esther, to contravene the truth of a word she said. Indeed the wily lady knew full well that it was this very return to her establishment which her pupil most would dread. She knew that the very days and hours yet to elapse ere her return to Torquay had all been laid

under contribution—that Esther longed to be free from the restraints at present laid upon her—that she had counted on the very liberty of action which she herself was representing as so hurtful to her ; and the quick perception of Esther divined the cause. She knew that she was the most profitable as well as the most accomplished girl in the school—that the pecuniary affairs of Minerva Hall were rather at a low ebb, and that anything that afforded a chance of replenishing the exchequer was hailed with delight, whilst it caused the greatest pain to herself.

Not very well pleased, indeed, was the sage mistress at the sullenness, as she termed it, with which Esther received her advice, and dismissing, with a somewhat severe reflection on their conduct for the language she had overheard, the little coterie of girls she had gathered around her, she laid down in a very formal way certain rules for the guidance of her life whilst at Torquay, to which Esther listened with an outward show of respect, but inwardly with the most apathetic indifference ; and at the close of the conversation the girl begged, not for recreation with her companions, or return to school duties, but only for one half-hour's quiet solitude with her own thoughts.

But there was a sort of romance about the character of Esther which never failed to excite the displeasure of the matter-of-fact governess. She judged solitude the very worst thing possible, and so it was that this most innocent request was refused, and Esther was bade return to her studies.

With an aching head then, and a heavy heart, Esther took her place under her preceptress, apparently busily occupied, but with her mind really fixed on the happiness she had lost —on her stranger step-mother, and her dreaded return to Minerva Hall, feeling right sure that she was only to be sent

there "to be kept out of the way," whilst, naturally clever and intelligent, she had already outstepped her preceptress.

CHAPTER IV.

"Nay, then, who have we here?" said Mrs. Clifton to her daughter, as, shading her eyes with her hand, she stood gazing out from the French windows of her villa, up the road beyond. "Surely," she continued, using her eye-glass, "yonder is Mr. Ashley; but I would fain hope that the young lady leaning on his arm be not Esther; if so, I would wish, Lucy, that you had a younger step-daughter."

"Oh! ma'ma, how you do annoy me with your fears," said Lucy, putting aside several articles of bridal finery which had been sent for her inspection, she having, by the way, selected the most expensive, aware though she was that her mother would have to deny herself many little comforts for one year at least, till these etceteras should be paid for. "I have no doubt," she added, "but that Esther and I will get on very well together; and, besides, Reuben has told me she shall return to boarding-school for at least two years; so there will be no worry, as far as Esther is concerned; and pray do not let us meet trouble half way."

"And a very unjust thing it will be to send back to school such a girl as Esther," replied her mother, in an under tone; for by this time Mr. Ashley and his daughter had entered the garden.

Naturally a warm-hearted, amiable woman, the widow immediately strove to win the heart of the interesting girl who now stood before her, as the future step-daughter of her

own child, who, if six years older, was, from the peculiar slightness of her form and smallness of features, not a whit older in point of personal appearance. With the tact which a kind heart can always summon to its aid, Mrs. Clifton appeared not to notice the evident embarrassment of Esther, who, sooth to say, could scarce restrain her tears, and the good little woman felt wondrously impelled to press to her heart the motherless girl whose prospects in life were thus marred by Lucy's marriage with her father. Quickly, too, did the good-natured widow observe Esther change countenance, as her father opened a casket, displaying to the admiring gaze of the bride-elect a beautiful set of jewels, composed of the flashing ruby, set in diamonds of the purest water. She noticed Esther's colour rise as he clasped a bracelet on Lucy's wrist, and her own heart told her that the young girl had seen those jewels last on her dead mother, and had, perhaps, with a girl's natural love for that which is costly and beautiful, thought of them as her own; and, drawing her aside, she said—

"Come with me, love, and let us have a little quiet chat together. I hope we shall become good friends. If Mr. Ashley would give you permission, would you like to spend with me those three months he intends for his bridal tour, instead of returning to Minerva Hall?"

A flash of delight immediately passed over the beautiful face of Esther, as she replied—

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Clifton, it is the very thing I should wish for, as—as this"—and Esther faltered, for she remembered she was speaking to the mother of Lucy, whom she considered as her rival in her father's affections.

"As what, love?" replied the widow, who read every thought of the girl's heart. "We know but little of each

other, Esther ; think of me only as a friend, not as Lucy's mother, and supply to me the place of the child I am about to lose."

" Well, then," replied Esther, gathering confidence as she spoke, " I can only think of poor ma'ma at present, and how things are altered to what I thought they *would* have been. I seem to have lost a place in my father's heart, and have nothing to love myself ;" and the poor girl, now fairly overcome, burst into tears.

" Nay, you must not say that, Esther," replied Mrs. Clifton. " Lucy is prepared to love you; and why should you think your father's affection weakened ? and, as for me, let me be to you what your mother was. Say, shall this be ?"

A mute pressure of the hand was the only answer Esther could give ; for at this moment, to the unspeakable vexation of her mother, the thoughtless Lucy came bounding along the garden, decked out in the luckless jewels which had excited so much pain in poor Esther's breast. Neck, arms, and head, had been arrayed in the brilliant gems, and her face radiant with pleasure, the vain and thoughtless young woman sought her mother, to show herself off in the wedding present her admiring suitor had bestowed.

" The jewels are, indeed, very beautiful," said Mrs. Clifton, carelessly ; then turning hurriedly away, she advanced to meet Mr. Ashley, and leading Esther by the hand, she said—

" I have a bargain to strike with you, my good friend. If you take from me my daughter Lucy, I must insist on your leaving with me, at Belle Vue, during your bridal tour, *your* daughter Esther. We are friends already, you must know ; and I cannot think of Esther being sent back to Minerva Hall, and I left here to mope alone."

"Be it just as you wish, Mrs. Clifton," said the Deacon, with one of his blandest smiles. "Esther can return, if we think it well, when we find our way back to the Oaklands."

A heavy feeling pressed at once on Esther's heart. She was then, after all, to be sent back to the detestable boarding-school. This was, no doubt, lest she should be considered in Lucy's way. Still, never mind, her return was warded off for the next three months; and though Mrs. Clifton occupied so anomalous a position as mother to one who had come between herself and her own well-being, she could not but love her already; so she strove to drive the darksome shadows from her mind, and think of the projected return to Minerva as an event which would, perhaps, never occur.

And sadness pressed on the good widow's heart, too, for she observed that Lucy gave a scarcely perceptible start, and that a slight flush mantled her cheek when she expressed a wish that Esther might be suffered to remain with herself. Why this should be the worthy little woman was at a loss to comprehend, for not for one moment could she think that Lucy would seriously wish to keep Esther absent from home.

"I have one bargain to make with you, relative to Esther," said the Deacon, ere bidding his bride-elect and her mother farewell. "Can you guess what it is? You know she will pass some twelve Sabbaths with you."

"Oh, certainly," replied the widow, with a smile. "I know what you allude to. Esther shall go to the Tabernacle as often as you please."

This point settled, the party separated—the Deacon right glad that Esther, of whom he was fond in his own peculiar fashion, liked the present arrangement much better than to return to Clapham, and much pleased that herself and Mrs. Clifton had taken such a fancy to each other, conscious that

it might do much towards smoothing down the difficulties which the minister had prophesied would grow out of his union, and rather better pleased to maintain peace in his household without being obliged to exert his own authority than otherwise.

Good Mrs. Clifton, however, little dreamed that a war of angry words awaited her with the wayward daughter, who was never so wilful as now that she was about to leave the maternal home; for no sooner had the door closed on the Deacon and poor Esther and their one servant dismissed for the night, than she exclaimed—

“What *could* you have been thinking of, ma’má, when you invited Esther to spend the time of our bridal tour here? It was my especial wish she should return to school.”

“*Your wish*,” exclaimed her mother, in accents of unfeigned surprise. “And, pray, *how* can it affect you, whether Esther returns or not? Remember, Lucy, she looks nearly as old as yourself, and was to have filled the place in her father’s house which you are about to occupy. I am perfectly grieved and astonished to see you display so unamiable a spirit. You ought to be glad to have her at the Oaklands, and try to make her as happy as possible.”

“Indeed,” replied Lucy, scornfully, “I quite disagree with you, ma’má, and think it would be much better if Esther were kept under subjection at school a little longer. She is much too old for me to like to have her always in the way; and then, too, the idea of your having invited her is quite sufficiently mortifying, as she must see everything connected with our straitened circumstances—our one servant, our scantily furnished table, our having no carriage, and all our other miseries, from which, thank Heaven! I am escaping. I never

felt more annoyed than at the unhappy mistake you have made in inviting that girl."

"And *I* never felt more annoyed, or, I should say, more grieved, Lucy, at finding in you such a want of good feeling, and, I must add, good sense also. Oh! shame upon you, Lucy. Think you that this is the way to propitiate your future husband's child?"

"Really, ma'ma, I cannot entertain your sublime ideas," said the wilful Lucy, now rising, and lighting a bed-room candle from a lamp which stood on the table. "I never intended to condescend to propitiate Esther, as you term it. I owe her no ill-will, I am sure; but I noticed that she turned pale as her father clasped this bracelet on my wrist." And as Lucy spoke she held to the light the sparkling ruby, adding, "If she indulges envious feelings, she is to blame, not I."

"Ah! my child, my child," said poor Mrs. Clifton, "lay it not to envy, though poor Esther might well be pardoned even for this; for I have heard those jewels were to be hers on her twenty-first birth day. But, is there not another cause? Were they not last seen on the person of her dead mother? Oh, Lucy, Lucy, add not to the weight of the cross her father's love for you has placed upon her shoulders."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," said Lucy, lightly touching her mother's cheek with her lips, "how glad I *shall* be when all this sermonising is over. Well, you shall have Esther's company all in good time, instead of mine; and I hope you'll like each other as much as you expect when you come together." So saying the vain, heartless Lucy sought her pillow, the poor mother, on her bended knees, praying that the grace of a better spirit might be given to her child.

CHAPTER V.

A fair June morning was that on which the wedding of Lucy Clifton was to take place ; and as soon as the first dawn of a new day had broken over the hills and vales of the prettiest spot in the west—sweet Torquay—the bride-elect was awake, and stepping to her chamber window, looked out on the lovely prospect around her. All was yet perfectly still, save the gentle murmur of the summer breeze, so soft that it scarce seemed to fan the hair from Lucy's cheek, and the song of the birds, whose matin hymn had already commenced, with the lowing of the kine in a field hard by. A bright and glorious sunshine was at hand ; and, though the unpoetical Lucy was by no means an enthusiastic admirer of Nature's beauties yet, even *her* prosaic nature melted, and a tear rose to her eyes as she thought of the distance she would be from that fair scene ere the sun, now rising high in the heavens, should set. Afar in the distance rose the turrets of the old abbey, with its *then* pleasant park, which is *now* parcelled out for letting on building leases. The thought of her ever affectionate mother, too, rose in her mind, and this frivolous young woman for a few moments felt distressed and sad.

“ But, oh ! never mind, Lucy,” whispers the spirit of vanity, ever at her side ; “ remember Reuben Ashley hath broad acres, and houses and lands, and equipages, and all that which thou hast so long sighed for.” And thus it was that in a very few moments the tears were dashed aside, and her lip was

wreathed in smiles, as she thought of her fortunate escape from the decent poverty in which her life had been spent ; and she looked almost contemptuously, too, on her little chamber, with its simple furniture and its plain French bedstead, and hangings of white dimity, and, throwing herself again on the bed, she conjured up many a bright picture of the future which awaited her.

Lucy slept not again ; but very long before there was occasion, aroused the slumbers of the one over-tasked maid, who had retired to rest quite wearied with the exactions of her young mistress on the previous night, as also her mother.

A young friend had volunteered her services in assisting the bride-elect in the all-important duties of the toilette ; but she was a short half hour beyond the time at which she had promised to be at the cottage, and Lucy began the day of her wedding in anything but an amiable frame of mind, hesitating not to greet her friend with so ill-tempered an exclamation as—

“ I really think, Margaret, that it would have been as well to have kept away altogether, if you did not choose to be true to your appointment. However,” she added, “ it is not of much consequence. I shall know who to regard as my friends when Mrs. Ashley.”

This covert allusion to the happy alteration in her affairs stung Margaret to the quick, and she answered with some asperity—

“ Believe me, I did not offer my services because I was on the look-out for any substantial advantage from you after your marriage, Lucy. I never act from such paltry motives. When I arrived home yesterday, I found my mother was ill. I have passed a disturbed night, and should probably be sleeping still but for my appointment here. If you choose to

accept my services with a good grace, I am here to render them willingly ; if not, I am *quite* as ready to go."

This sharp reply had its desired effect. Lucy was obliged to humble her pride and ask Margaret to stop, though she inwardly determined to punish her hereafter, by denying to her now comparatively poor friend that friendship, when Mrs. Ashley, which she had freely bestowed when simple Miss Clifton.

Alas! poor Margaret, poor mother, poor maid, how much had you not all to suffer on this wedding morn. Only wait an hour, all the caprice and temper of the last day is nothing to that which is before you now.

The task of dressing had commenced, and was proceeding pretty quietly, and, with a few sundry exclamations of impatience on her part, Lucy's hair had been really well dressed by the poor young lady who had unfortunately volunteered her services as maid, and she had surveyed her handsome face in the glass with no small satisfaction, even vouchsafing a compliment to Margaret on her success. But, look sharp, Lucy, or you will surely be too late ; time enough, child, to admire your beauty later ; for the hand of the clock will move round quicker than you desire. See, now, in one short half hour the happy Reuben will come to claim you for his own. So says common sense to the thoughtless Lucy, who, with a suppressed exclamation of impatience that time would go so fast, she turns aside for Margaret to throw carefully over her head the white satin slip, with its beautiful dress of Brussels lace, for which the too indulgent mother had involved herself to procure. The slip fits to perfection ; how should it be otherwise ?—for both that and the dress had been tried on before an admiring friend on the previous day. And so, well satisfied, the lace robe is placed over her shoulders somewhat too hastily, as the result showed.

Vain ladies are fond of tight dresses; and if the dress-maker finds her employer covets a small waist, the unhappy consequences of a torn dress, especially if the fabric is of a thin texture, is sure to follow. And, oh! horror of horrors, this was the case with Lucy's costly robe. Hastily she had drawn it on, and the little rent which she had made and not perceived on the previous evening was now a large tear, running in a zig-zag direction across the bodice. And what followed? A frantic exclamation, a burst of tears, vows of vengeance against the dress-maker, and in an agony of grief the dress itself was taken off, and thrown to the other end of the room; and a beautiful pearl necklace, her mother's gift, torn from her neck, and cast on the ground the pearls falling in all directions.

"Oh! Lucy, Lucy dear, why will you give way thus?" exclaimed the poor mother, while the half-frightened Margaret picked up the dress, leaving Mrs. Clifton to gather up the scattered pearls, then turning her own attention to the former article.

"A fearful mischance for the bridal morn it doubtless was," so thought Margaret; but, "what can't be cured must be endured" says the old adage, and there are worse ills even on a wedding day than a piece of torn finery; so the well-intentioned girl quietly went to her friend's work-table, and returning with the necessary articles, seated herself with the intention of repairing the dress. But, alas! Lucy's temper was fairly roused, and snatching the dress from her hand, she vowed, in all the mad folly of her nature, that she would not wear a torn dress on her wedding day.

"But you must," urged both mother and friend, "for you have nothing else fit for the occasion."

However, no one can argue with a fool, and such was Lucy,

when she suffered her temper to get the better of her ; and so it happened that that odious Time, which never will stand still, kept moving on as usual, and the hand of the timepiece pointed to five minutes of the hour ere Margaret was suffered to begin her task.

It was no easy one either to execute neatly, and only a few delicately fine threads of the injured fabric had been gathered up by the skilful needle of Margaret when Reuben Ashley, with a glad and smiling countenance, accompanied by his daughter, drove up to the cottage gate.

Ah ! me, even a pretty woman loses her prettiness if her eyes are swollen with weeping, and there was more than the mere fact of weeping to mar the beauty of Lucy on this occasion, for what face on earth can look pretty if evil passions are at work ; and thus when Reuben was admitted to his bride, the thought “ How could I have thought her so beautiful ? ” crossed his mind.

Ah ! dear reader, what a good thing it is that one’s thoughts cannot be read. If our heads were of glass, and even our best friends could see those thoughts, which like darksome shadows cross our inward temples, what should we do !

However, good Margaret and the poor patient mother tried to make the best of the affair ; they concealed the adventure of the broken necklace, the anger and vanity and haste which had caused the accident, and, we much fear, threw too much blame on Miss Green, the absent dressmaker, who could not speak in her own defence.

But the robe is repaired, the nimble fingers of Margaret have worked wonders, and the still but half-grateful Lucy slips on the injured dress. The veil is thrown over her head ; the orange blossoms placed around the tresses, which are allowed to fall over the shoulders, for Lucy is a virgin bride ;

and still flushed and heated, and at heart unhappy too, for the vain and selfish never can be happy, Lucy and her mother, with Reuben, Esther, and a few select friends invited to the wedding, step into the carriages which are to convey them to Torre Abbey, in the chapel attached to which the marriage vows were to be pronounced.

CHAPTER VI.

No small sensation had been caused by the wedding of Lucy and the Deacon, and a gay crowd of loiterers had assembled in the Abbey grounds long before the dashing equipages drove up to the chapel door.

"Now, Reuben, you do not feel half at ease with yourself, for you must enter this Romish chapel and be wedded by a Popish priest."

Gaily shines the bright sunlight through the ivied windows of the quaint old chapel, and the bridal procession passes onward to the altar; Esther and Mildred Herbert, a valued friend of the late Mrs. Ashley, are the bridesmaids.

Mildred is what is commonly called in the Church of England an *earnest* person; and, being really ever in earnest in all she said or did, she thought this match a very unwise one, knowing as she does the temper and opinions of the Deacon. However, the bride is before the altar, and the words were in a few moments pronounced, which united Lucy's fate with that of Ashley till death should part them.

After the marriage had been solemnized Mass was said, and Lucy's friends observed, that, at the moment of consecration, Mr. Ashley retained his seat, while Miss Herbert knelt,

and they averred that, as he would not pay an outward mark of respect at the moment of this most solemn act, he was likely to hold the reins rather more tightly than Lucy would relish. However, all dissentient opinions were likely to be regarded as mere outbreaks of envious persons, who secretly regretted that they could not make such good matches for their own daughters, so these good people wisely kept their ideas to themselves, and followed in the train of the bridal party, who were now ready to leave the chapel.

It is a miserable thing for persons who keep small houses to attempt to entertain a party of people, and though poor Mrs. Clifton had done her best, in order that all should "go off well," and had provided a really sumptuous breakfast, yet it was an overcrowded affair, the small rooms became most oppressively hot, so that every one looked flushed and inconvenienced by the too close proximity of his neighbour.

However, there is an end to all things, and so it happened, that, a few hours later, after sundry fine speeches and compliments had been made, the bride withdrew and changed her gay attire for a rich green silk, with a close bonnet and elegant Indian shawl, a present from Mr. Ashley some weeks since. She had now assumed one of her most amiable moods, and looked very beautiful. Whilst making her adieu Esther stedfastly regarded her, and having asked herself the question, "there is some good trait in every one's character, can I not love her if I try?" the mental reply was in the negative, for there was a frivolity, a selfishness, an abandonment of principle, a subjection of superior to inferior things in the character of Lucy, which repulsed both herself and Mildred.

And now, farewells have passed between Lucy and her friends, Esther has received her father's fond embrace, and the lip of her step-mother has coldly pressed her forehead.

Mrs. Clifton, forgetful of the scene of the morning and of all her vanity and thoughtlessness, is shedding tears of grief over that wayward daughter, from whom she must now part. And Lucy's tears flow too, though at the same time she feels it is exceedingly *gauche* in her to weep, and she whispers :—

“ *N'importe*, ma'ma, we must not let every one see us in tears. Of course you will feel my loss very much, but after a while you won't miss me ; nay, I expect Esther will more than make up for my loss.”

“ Ah ! cruel Lucy,” thought the affectionate mother, her arms gradually relaxing their hold, “ do I deserve this for all my loving care of thee ? But fear not, poor stricken mother; many a true word is spoken in jest and satire, and thus shalt thou find in Esther, good and wise and gentle as she is, a happy exchange for Lucy's loss.”

Softly had the latter spoken, but the quick ear of Esther had caught the words, and her eye noted the change in Mrs. Clifton's countenance, which that sharp pang given by her thoughtless child had called forth ; and Esther mentally resolved to take that stricken one to her own warm heart, and endeavour to win to herself the love which Lucy had so carelessly flung aside.

A handsome equipage is now at the gate, and, elated with joy at the change in her worldly circumstances, Lucy seats herself therein, and waves her handkerchief in token of adieu. Onward down the dusty road bowls the carriage, and just before a turn in the road takes them out of sight, Lucy rises and looks back. Ah ! how pleased was that poor mother ! She had asked herself the question—*would* not Lucy once more turn for one long last look ? Yes, she had ; and she felt as if it half atoned for her late ungenerous speech.

Oh ! *what a mistake!* Lucy had beheld the white walls of Oaklands gleaming through the trees, for her husband had pointed out the cliff on which his stately mansion stood, speaking of it as her future home.

“Comparisons are odious.” But Lucy would not withstand the wish she felt to look again on her humble little home of the past, in order to enjoy more vividly the brightness of the future ; so once again she had turned,—not to look upon the poor weak mother, who, with hand raised to shade her eyes from the blinding glare of the sun, had even left the garden gate, and stood gazing up the road till she could see no longer the carriage which hurried her darling from her sight,—not on her had that last gaze been bestowed, but on her humble home, which now by contrast appeared more miserable than ever.

Was there an alloy in Lucy’s cup of happiness ? Yes, there was. As she re-seated herself the thought expressed before recurred again to her mind ; it was one of vexation that Esther should become acquainted, by her residence with her mother, of the circumstances connected with her poverty.

Go on, thoughtless one, soon shalt thou find that the path of roses before thee is not without its thorns, thorns which shall pierce through and through thy vain and selfish heart, till, happily, some miracle of grace shall call thee back. On with thy husband, so opposed to thee, not only in religious opinions, but also in those minor details which often spring therefrom. He has married thee for thy beauty, and thou hast taken *him* for his gold. Truly, after all, then, the Deacon’s marriage is only an every day affair—a quite common occurrence. *Exactly* so. Were not these the requirements often looked after by man on the one hand, and by woman on the other, there would be fewer unhappy marriages. We

will shew in future chapters how very few concomitants for happiness really existed, albeit, the Deacon was rich and his bride beautiful.

CHAPTER VII.

Far, far away from her childhood's home wanders the bride of one short month. In one of the most fashionable quarters of the fair city of Florence Mr. Ashley had hired a stately residence, its gardens overlooking the beautiful Arno, were ornamented with fountains and cascades, groves of orange and lemon trees sent forth their fragrant perfume, and the fairest flowers of this fair clime crept along the white portico of this all but palatial residence, and grew around in wild profusion.

It is a soft clear moonlight night, and no sound is heard save the evening hymn of the boatmen, who are rowing homewards,—a happy party, whose light skiff seems merely to glide over the blue waters of the Arno,—or the vesper bell of a distant monastery, whose grey walls loom darkly in the distance, whilst the moonbeams bring out in bold relief every nook and corner of the fair spot Reuben has chosen for his temporary home. Lucy stands alone plucking the leaves of a splendid Camellia Japonica, which she carelessly flings aside, discontent and vexation mar the beauty of her features, and she already finds that the roses with which her path is strewn are not without their thorns.

The bride of one short month was angry, discontented, and at war with herself, and him whom she had chosen for her spouse. So short a time had passed since the wedding morn, and already the peace of Reuben's household was at stake.

The cold light of the moon disappeared as it gradually sank beneath a cloud, the air grew somewhat chill, and yet, in a sullen bitter spirit she wanders through the grounds. Suddenly she pauses, and a proud smile sets upon her lips as she murmurs,—

“I knew he would come to me at last, I have triumphed and *will* have my own way.”

The step was again heard, and, breaking through an adjacent thicket of orange and lemon, Reuben approached, and drawing her to his side, he exclaimed, “Come in, Lucy, pray come in ; why quarrel for the few words I said.”

Lucy impatiently flung aside the arm which her husband had tenderly drawn within his own ; and, wishful in the folly of her mad vanity to make her triumph more complete, she exclaimed,—

“ You knew how I had been brought up before you married me, you knew what my own views and opinions were, and yet you will not be silent, but take every opportunity of obtruding your prejudices upon me. I wish I were Lucy Clifton again if *this* is the life I am to expect,” continued the spoiled beauty, whose ready tears now came to her aid.

“ Softly, Lucy,” replied her husband, drawing her reluctantly to his side. “ Do not lay all the blame on me ; remember there was so little that was *earnest* in your character, that, you must pardon me if I did not think you quite in earnest as to religious opinions. But let us not say another word on the subject. Come back to the house, love,” he added, “ and do not suffer yourself to be made unhappy by what has passed.”

Reuben had meant when he sallied forth to seek his irritated wife to be far less gentle as to words ; but the sight of her tears, shed for the first time where he was concerned, softened him, and he soon checked himself, when about to reply to her

untrue remark—that she wished herself again Lucy Clifton, and resolved to lead her on by kindness rather than severity. Indeed, Reuben Ashley had some good points in his character, his errors being rather those of early education than of the heart ; moreover, he was shrewd and penetrating in his judgment, and knew well that Lucy carped at every word he might let fall, rather from an obstinate and quarrelsome disposition, than from a purer motive. Unfortunately, the character and principles of each, if such a mind as Lucy's could be said to possess any principle whatever, were utterly antagonistic to each other. The worst point, in fact, in Reuben's disposition was a certain sort of tyranny, which he loved to exercise over others in his capacity as head of the household, and which, in these early days of his married life, already made itself felt by the spoiled and irritable girl whom he had made his wife.

By soft words and gentle persuasion Ashley induced her to return to the house, and as the readiest means of bringing her into good humour, promised on the following day to take her to see the principal churches in Florence. The previous day had been Sunday, the fourth recurrence of that day since the wedding—the three former had been passed in Paris, and it was Reuben's wont generally to attend the chapels officiated in by the Church of England clergy attached to the embassies whenever he happened to be sojourning on the continent, or to those of the consuls. He used to leave Lucy at the door of the church at which she might resolve to hear Mass, and hitherto all had gone on smoothly between them.

However, on their arrival in Florence, Lucy, all of a sudden became a most devoted and enthusiastic Catholic ; and the woman who, in Torquay, had frittered away the best part of each morning at her toilet, or in her bed, now became so devout as to outward appearances as to rise early and attend

Mass daily, whilst Reuben, who had always looked upon her as lax in the performance of her religious duties, set down this sudden overflow of piety to anything but pure motives ; for a right-minded woman would have known that, there being no obligation, such duties might be dispensed with for the sake of domestic peace, for thus alone can *practical* religion be shewn forth.

Thus, then, it was that bickerings first commenced, the weaker party taking the initiative. Yet the dissenter husband was for some time silent, till on the Sunday alluded to, the remark escaped his lips,—

“ I wish, Lucy, we did not go two different ways.”

“ What mean you ?” replied his wife.

“ Oh, you know perfectly well what I mean,” said Ashley. “ I mean that I wish you could accompany me to the Chapel of the Consul, and when we return to Torquay, to the Tabernacle. And especially, my dear, I wish you to know that I think it rather strange you have suddenly become so very devout. I assure you, I thought you a very lax Catholic when I married you.”

“ Indeed,” replied Lucy, glancing significantly at her husband. “ Well, perhaps I see the necessity of turning over a new leaf now, and pursuing a quite different course, now that I am married, to that which I followed when single.”

“ Lucy,” said the Deacon, “ I cannot in the least appreciate the motives from which you act. Your conduct is very different to what it was. You seem to me to be guided by a mere spirit of obstinacy, which I shall not put up with quietly.”

Thus ended the first matrimonial quarrel ; and, impatiently dashing aside the tears which rose to her eyes, Lucy hurried from the room out into the grounds adjoining her elegant

abode, nor did she return till joined by her husband in the manner we have mentioned, long after the evening shadows had deepened into night.

However, the quarrel was for the present made up ; and early the ensuing morning Mr. Ashley accompanied his wife on her proposed visit to the churches of Florence, first wending their way to the parish church of S. Maria del Fiore,—its beautiful dome giving its name to the square,—the marble pavement of various colours, laid out in exquisite designs,—the steeple, consisting of a square tower of superb structure, composed of variously-coloured marbles, and decorated with statues, attracted their admiration ; ascending which by a staircase of well-nigh five hundred steps, Ashley and his wife gazed down on the fair city of Florence, with its fortresses, the one at the east the other at the west, overlooking the beautiful Boboli Gardens. Opposite the cathedral stands the old church of St. John the Baptist, its octagonal form covered with marble ; the edifice entered by three doors of bronze. Besides being adorned with numerous statues, by great sculptors, there are two columns of porphyry at the principal entrance, whilst sixteen of granite support the roof, which is covered with Mosaics. The church of St. Lawrence next attracted Lucy's admiration ; its high altar composed of marble, adorned with precious stones, combining in itself all that genius can render grand and imposing. Behind the choir is situated the famous chapel of the Medici, the wonder of all Tuscany. It is executed with jasper, agate, lapislazuli, and precious stones, and adorned with magnificent tombs surmounted by colossal statues in bronze. Lucy was loud in her admiration, whilst the Deacon, who termed himself a lover of “ primitive simplicity,” admired also, in answer to the enquiries of his wife, the exceeding beauty of what he beheld, but,

at the same time, declared that he thought the Lord better served by the exquisite simplicity of such places as the Tabernacle, adding, in the very words of the Jews who rebuked Magdalen, “Would it not be better that these costly things were sold, and the price thereof given to the poor?”

“No, they are given to God instead,” replied Lucy; “the Catholic loves to draw together all that is costly and beautiful for His service; where can they be so well bestowed?”

“The Lord needeth not our riches but our hearts,” said the Deacon. “Be convinced of this, Lucy: in an empty room in the meanest hut, the poorest cabin, the plainest meeting-house, God can be adored.”

Domestic jar was again at hand, the hot blood mantled the cheek of Lucy, and she replied,

“Pray let us have no more of this, Reuben; I am quite as conscious as you can be that God can be served without all this luxury and adornment; witness the mean places, sometimes not worthy the name of chapels, which we have had to use since despoiled by the change in religion, of the glorious edifices which belonged to us of old. In the depths of the lonely forest, as in the lonely catacombs, in a stable alike as in this majestic temple, can be and often is offered the service of the church.”

“Well done, Lucy,” replied the Deacon, “I really should not have thought you could have made so long a speech; but give to me along with our reformed doctrines the perfect simplicity which the Dissenter prizes, and do you keep, with what I term the corruptions of your church, all its pomps and statues, jewels and ceremonies.”

Only a few hours since had the Deacon made up the first skirmish with his wife, and another was even now at hand.

Lucy had relapsed into a moody silence. He saw that a single word more would overthrow the slight superstructure of affectionate feeling which had subsisted between himself and his wife since their reconciliation of the previous evening, and wisely avoided further discussion ; but even as the honeymoon had waned, so Ashley was aware that his domestic happiness had faded away, and Lucy, that in the little humble cottage at Torquay, with all its poverty and meanness, was, perhaps, more peace than she would find at Oaklands, with all its luxury and wealth ; so soon did she begin to feel the stern truth of the saying, that, “money does not always bring happiness.”

CHAPTER VIII.

July had set in, and the season being unusually hot, Mrs. Clifton had resolved to leave for a while her dear little home, humble though it was, and, in company with Esther and her friend Mildred, pay a visit for a few weeks to the metropolis. Did we say Mrs. Clifton missed the wayward, irritable Lucy, we should exaggerate. Her loss was well supplied in the presence of the gentle, amiable girl who was fast becoming all-in-all to her. The widow herself, too, possessed that virtue so inestimable in woman—the tact of making those around her happy, and in a very few weeks a load of sorrow seemed lifted from Esther’s heart. In Mildred, too, Mrs. Clifton found an amiable woman, who, possessing just enough of this world’s goods to ensure a moderate share of its comforts, and, perhaps, an occasional use of its luxuries, had become enamoured with the rustic simplicity of Mrs. Clifton’s domicile, had the good sense to hide her knowledge of its deficiencies, which arose



from the slender income of its owner, and spent many a happy hour with her new friend, practising a thousand little arts by which she ameliorated the condition of Mrs. Clifton, who was struggling on in her genteel poverty; whilst neither by word nor action did she cause the slightest pain to her whom she wished to befriend.

Thus, then, it was, that Mildred had herself proposed the journey to London, for, without her aid, she knew it could never be attempted; and the three ladies prepared for their departure, Mrs. Clifton allowed to pay various etceteras connected with the journey, which Mildred intended to repay later in the quietest way possible from her own well-stored purse. A friend of Mildred's had procured apartments for their use in a street contiguous to one of the squares west of the metropolis, and accordingly the evening of their arrival beheld them located in a large old-fashioned house with long narrow windows, the lace curtains of which would have looked exceedingly yellow if contrasted with the white draperies at Torquay; the furniture of the rooms was good, but very old-fashioned, as was the house, and also its owners. The one was an invalid lady, over whose head some seventy-five years had passed; her form was attenuated, her face pale, the white hair was bound smoothly over the furrowed brow, and she had already won the respect of her new inmates, who had occasionally met her on the staircase, with a white shawl thrown over her head to protect herself from the draughts. Her husband was, perhaps, some ten years older than herself, his still fine features unmarred by time, but his half palsied hand trembling as it nervously grasped the balustrade, or the stick which he used for support. White as silver were the few locks which time had left him; and when chance threw

him in the way of the ladies, he would address them with all the politeness of a finished gentleman.

These old people with two female servants comprised the whole household, and the same unbroken silence seemed ever to reign in the dull old house, unless the merry voice of Esther disturbed the stillness of the scene.

One summer evening, Mildred had sat musingly by the window, looking out on the dusty plants and trees in the square beyond, weary with a previous night at the opera, and almost wishing to be again in the country, whilst yet the time allotted for her stay had not half expired, when her thoughts took another turn, and she exclaimed,—

“ Is not this a very strange house, dear Mrs. Clifton ? decayed gentility reigns herein supreme, for we dare not apprehend that this is what is termed a dwelling house ; the faces, too, of those dear old people tell such a tale of quiet suffering, that it really makes my heart ache to see them. The house-maid tells me they have a son, who is daily expected from the West Indies ; that he is, in fact, their chief support ; and that, in addition thereto, she knows he has been long engaged in paying off his father’s debts.”

“ Poor old people ! then are they blessed in having such a son ? ” said Mrs. Clifton, wiping the ready tear from her eyes, and casting a thought, mayhap, on her own daughter, whose conduct stood but in unfavourable contrast with that of the young man of whom Mildred was speaking.

“ But have you heard the *whole* of Martha’s tale ? ” exclaimed Esther, breaking suddenly in ; have you heard that this noble creature has *wholly* devoted himself to these aged people until now, that for some years he wished to unite himself with one whom he knew long since, that he fancied she would not mind sharing this dark old house with him, and

that, after a long absence, he went to claim her for his bride ? But, lo ! a rich suitor had turned up in the interim, his lady love was *not* for him, and so, says Martha, my young master is coming back to this desolate old house, tries to make the best of it, and, at least, to wear a smile while with the poor old people."

After this conversation the ladies took a warm interest in everything relating to the owners of the house. How little did they then think that they had been in any way worked up with the fortunes of the worthy people in whose trials they sympathized ?

Some few days later Martha could talk about nothing but the expected arrival of her young master, for whom she was making active preparation ; and Esther was much amused at the activity with which she fitted up the best room, still unoccupied, which was intended for his use.

It was nearly eight o'clock one August evening, Mrs. Clifton and Mildred had gone to a concert, Esther, somewhat indisposed, remaining at home, and reclining half asleep on the couch, was aroused by a succession of deep moans proceeding from the parlour beneath.

It was the work of a moment with the impulsive Esther to run down the staircase, at the foot of which she met the affrighted Martha, who, in tones of urgent entreaty, begged her to come to her assistance, for that she believed her mistress was dying.

The poor old lady was lying on the floor, her countenance wearing the semblance of death. Esther had beheld the awful change which had taken place in her mother, and immediately dispatched the maid for medical aid, volunteering to remain alone with the dying woman till her return, for the cook and the old gentleman were both absent from home.

On her knees, beside her, fervently praying for courage, Esther supported her head, chafed her hands, and nervously counted the moments, which seemed lengthened into hours, as she watched the evening shadows fall in that long dark room, and noted the finger of death pass over that pallid countenance. Tremblingly she arose from her knees, and hastening upstairs, lighted a taper, which she had scarcely done, when the sound of coach-wheels and a heavy knock at the door, struck upon her delighted ear; on opening which, Martha rushed in followed by a medical gentleman, and the next moment by a third party in the undress of a naval officer, who gazed in mute bewilderment on the unexpected scene before him; then kneeling beside the dying woman, he pressed his lips to the cold forehead, whilst the words—"my dear, dear mother," burst from his lips.

"This, then, thought Esther, is the son, of whom I have heard so much." And has he returned too late—too late for even one little word?—Yes; a mute significant pressure of the hand alone told that for one moment the spirit of the mother had lingered in its upward flight, and with an expressive glance at the fair girl who had held her dying form during that long half hour, the spirit of the unfortunate old lady had passed to a better world.

"Can I give further help?" said Esther, tears coursing down her face as she spoke; "there is no one here but Martha."

The stranger looked at her with admiring surprise and accepted her offer, and between herself and Martha the last offices were rendered to the deceased lady ere the return of either her husband or Martha's fellow servant.

In the midst of this sore distress Mrs. Clifton and Mildred returned home, and they gazed in no small astonishment at

Esther, who, very pale, and silently weeping, stood at the door of the drawing-room awaiting their approach. But, ere a word was uttered, the son, whose return had been so anxiously expected, entered the room to tender Esther his warmest thanks for the service she had rendered ; but, even while he uttered his expression of grateful acknowledgment, the words, “Is it possible that I behold Captain Seymour ?” fell from the lips of the amazed Mrs. Clifton.

Yes, so it was, the rejected suitor of the frivolous Lucy ; and the devoted, self-sacrificing son of whom Martha had said so much that was good, stood face to face with those who held his noble qualities in such just admiration.

CHAPTER IX.

The bright gay hues of the summer flowers have given place to the sombre hues of autumn, and though September can scarcely be said to be on the wane, the morning air is chill, and warns us that the death of another year is at hand. The sere and withered leaves lay upon the path, and the wind sighed sadly, and even in sweet Devon the mild soft air had visibly and suddenly changed.

It is undoubtedly true, that the nature of the scene without—the very style of the weather, has an influence on our spirits, perhaps, even more powerful than we imagine ; and even those persons whose minds are the strongest and best regulated, will allow that they have experienced the truth of these observations.

Thus it was with Amelia Harcourt, one of two sisters whom we introduced in the opening pages of our tale, and who, alone

in her cottage, at Dawlish, counted anxiously the hours of absence of the younger lady, her sister Rosa.

When the term *strong-minded* is applied to woman, we are sometimes prone to imagine one who does not possess those tender qualities which belong more especially to the softer sex. Such, however, was not the case with her whom we now introduce to the reader—not in the hey-day of youth and beauty, for the one was on the wane, and the other fled forever under the united touch of sickness, care, and sorrow.

Pre-eminently gifted by rare endowments both of mind and body, was this happy Amelia; but the strength of mind, the genius she unquestionably possessed, never weakened the soft graces of the true-hearted woman, or tarnished with one grain of pride, or foolish self-assumption, a disposition which, taught in the bitter school of adversity, had come forth from the fiery ordeal pure and unscathed.

The eldest daughter of a young and somewhat improvident marriage, Miss Harcourt had early learned to drink deeply of the bitter waters of disappointment. If whilst, still very young, before her afterwards well-governed and well-stored mind taught her, by habits of reflection and of severe and arduous study, to look beyond the mere pleasures of life for happiness, she had sometimes yearned to taste of the gaieties of life; if her glass too truly told the tale, sometimes so destructive to woman's peace and woman's virtue, that the face reflected was fair to an extent of loveliness rarely possessed, and the soft eye, perchance, became for a moment humid at the contemplation of earthly joys which she might never know; that tear, even then, when youth was her's, was quickly dashed aside, and her sweet face grew radiant with smiles at the thought of a change to come one day; and, if even that day of earthly well-being came not, why, then, thought Amelia,



there is the bright day of eternity, which will more than compensate for the dark shadows of time.

Years sped on, and it so happened that these shadows deepened yearly, nay, daily. The Harcourts were unfortunate people, truly unfortunate, nothing to which they put their hand prospered ; the family increased ; their means of income, from one cause or another, rapidly diminishing. The one blessing left seemed Amelia, who, like some being from a better world, whispered hope to others, when herself, sick at heart, whose bright smile, forced though it was when the heart was ready to burst, shed peace, if it could not infuse joy, on those around her.

When in her twentieth year, and the child Rosa in her tenth, the heaviest calamity befell the family in the death of their father. Henceforth their descent downwards was rapid enough ; none could supply the father's place, small as had been his income, and it had been derived only from his paintings, for Harcourt was an artist. Now, even that was gone, and the sole hope of the family rested in the untiring exertions and talents of the brave, courageous girl, who, after she had closed that father's eyes, sought that father's chief patron and friend, received from him the means to secure decent burial, listened to his encouraging words of advice, and returned home to soothe and prepare for her night's rest her blind and infirm mother, and then snatch a few hours' broken rest on a pillow bedewed with tears, ere she rose to perform the duties of the day.

And what were those duties ? Was there no servant to keep the house clean, manage the younger children, and perform those many household duties which must be done to go through the daily routine of domestic life ? Yes, there was one little unkempt, untidy girl, who did what is familiarly

termed *the dirty work*, yet, much of that same work was left for the delicate hands of the accomplished Amelia, who, from the very coarsest, very roughest, hardest duties of domestic life, could pass with the greatest ease to those of the refined gentlewoman.

Not only poverty but disgrace also was to fall on this most unfortunate family. Deprived by death of the restraint imposed by their father's presence, the two elder boys committed an act of dishonesty. Their employer, in mercy to their afflicted family, forbore to prosecute, and the youths—with their lost character—enlisted into a regiment about to embark for Canada, there to remain in active service for the period of twelve years. There remained then, beside the child Ross, a younger brother, twelve years of age, with the infirm mother. These three forlorn beings formed the charge of the young Amelia Harcourt.

Amelia received a certain amount of patronage, though not such as her talents entitled her to receive; but she had neither interest nor money, moreover, she lacked that sort of assumption which is, perhaps, necessary to persons who wish to push on in the world,—she was restrained by that sort of *mauvaise honte* or diffidence, call it what you will, which, often-times, the most talented woman is apt to feel.

There was still one bright hope—her hand had been asked in marriage, ere her father's death, by a well-doing, worthy merchant. She was on the point of marriage when it occurred, then, though the pang of disappointment was sharp, a stern resolve was made.

Some time hence, she must first exert herself for those whose retreat, without her aid, must be the poorhouse.

So dragged on the first weary three years; mercantile affairs called Edgar Morton from his home, but he freed her

not from her engagement—wrote to her constantly ; but, even when Amelia perused these letters, she would lay them down with a sigh, and, it may be, a thought, which, shaped in words, would have said—"Edgar is well off, would he feel much poorer at the year's end if he allowed me to bring to his home my blind mother, and sent Herbert and Rosa to school?"

Poor Amelia ! measure not the love of others by thine own enduring affection ; yet, so she did ; and as nothing could tempt her to swerve from the high standard of duty she had made her guiding star to follow, it so happened, that, on his return to England, Edgar Morton chose a bride from amongst those frivolous thousands of our sex who, most assuredly, stoop not voluntarily to pluck the thorns which stern duty may place in their path. It was, simply, Amelia's mission to do and to suffer ; she could not be untrue to herself ; there was the line of *duty* placed clearly before her eyes, and, perchance, no reward *here* for its exercise. Well, never mind, the will of God must be accomplished. He would reward her eventually, that was quite certain. And so years passed on, each one adding nameless graces to the tried spirit of this devoted woman, and, at the same time, stealing away some exterior charm of beauty, so that, at thirty-six, her hair was marked by many a silvery thread—her forehead bore the lines caused by intense thought and care—the cheek was paler than in old times—the soft eye less bright, yet a sad sweet smile ever on the lips, the index of the patient and resigned soul within.

In many quarters, by painful, slow degrees, Amelia at last acquired fame, and with it a certain amount of worldly goods. Rosa had grown up into a fine intelligent woman, returning with interest Amelia's sisterly care ; the mother yet lived, blind and more infirm with each recurring year ; and

the cherished wish of the boy Herbert's life had been granted by the maiden sister's enduring love. He has entered the priesthood,—Amelia having set aside a certain portion of her earnings to pay for his maintenance while preparing for the ecclesiastical state.

It were, perhaps, small matter for wonder, that early trials had thrown over the lives of these ladies a touch of sadness. Rosa herself possessed as much talent as her sister; and, buried in the exercise of a pursuit which had become to both of them a passion, they led a very secluded but by no means a cheerless or dreary state of existence.

They chose a sweet spot for their residence, and frequently sojourned a few months each year in the fair clime of Italy, which we may almost term the birth-place of the arts. Nor was Rosa to pass through life without her own peculiar trials. Not, indeed, when poverty and dire distress was at their door had Rosa, good and fair as she was, been wooed. No, save in the pages of romance, such is rarely the case, for rarely is the noble nature to be met with, which, in the middling walks of life, will choose a partner from a poor home.

Thus, then, it was, that the early days of Rosa's youth had passed by, and with them the sharpest sting of penury; and when talent and industry at *last* secured emolument and comfort, *then* a wealthy American offered her his hand. But Rosa had known him years since, when Amelia and herself were struggling almost without a hope, and at that time had been left unnoticed, and she now resolved for no new tie harshly to break asunder that which subsisted between herself and Amelia. Thus, then, it was, that we find them as at the commencement of our tale, doing good to all who required their aid, as far as their limited means would allow,—happy yet, with a tinge of sadness thrown over their characters, the

result of long years of sorrow, poverty, disappointment,—of harsh contact with the world,—of vexation of spirit, discovering its utter hollowness, yet, with no misanthropical tendencies, for they had met with instances of sterling virtue amid the harder natures around them.

But return we from our too long digression. The day seemed very long ere it waned away, yet Rosa returned not to Dawlish; and, becoming alarmed, she was on the point of dispatching a messenger to the Oaklands, whither Rosa had gone early that morning, when a letter was put in her hands from her sister, to say that she was unavoidably detained, perhaps, for some days to come.

CHAPTER X.

The bride of three short months has returned to the Oaklands;—what should there be to discontent her? Esther is not yet in her way, for she yet remains in London with Lucy's mother and her friend Mildred; yet there has been such strife with the newly married pair, that dangerous illness has been the result, and Rosa Harcourt has been sent for, even by Reuben Ashley himself, and he hopes that her mild demeanour and the unquestionable virtue she possesses, and which the Deacon regards with respect, may work some good with Lucy.

What a great mistake had been committed?—what mistakes are daily committed in these hapless unions?—unions in which the question of virtue, compatibility of temper or principle, are never consulted; where a beautiful face, or, perchance, a well-filled purse, is alone looked for.

The Deacon had returned to the Oaklands, with that sort of comfortable feeling often experienced by John Bull. On his return to his native place, after a short tour on the continent, and though he had manifold misgivings as to whether his name would not soon become a bye-word at Torquay, he, nevertheless, resolved on not compromising his marital dignity, but would firmly resist every encroachment on the part of his wife.

With feelings of unmixed pleasure, Lucy took possession of her new home; but, on the morning after her arrival, the first squall took place. Oh! Deacon, Deacon, you begin to repent your choice, and there is no Sir Cresswell Cresswell to set you free.

A grand ball was about to be given by one of the leading families in the place, and—more out of mirth than from any better feeling, for the parties in question knew that dancing was an abomination in the eyes of Ashley—himself and his wife were invited. Lucy knew not, however, the extent to which some of her husband's prejudices prevailed, and her eyes sparkled with delight as she perused the letter, and placed it in Ashley's hands, with not the faintest shadow of suspicion crossing her mind that there was anything objectionable in his eyes to the acceptance of an invitation to a ball, at which all the *elite* of Torquay were expected to be present.

But Reuben's grave face grew yet graver as he perused the note, calmly refolded it, and said—in the most measured tones possible—"My dear wife, you will write politely to Mrs. Mervin and decline accepting that invitation. To my mind balls are quite as objectionable as theatres. I shall never suffer either wife or daughter of mine to dance. Now write at once," said Ashley, rising to leave the room as he spoke (somewhat apprehensive of a scene which, however, he did

not escape), “and we will then order the carriage for our morning drive.”

In utter dismay, and to the consternation of the half-scared husband, Lucy sprung from her seat, her lips colourless, the ready tears in her eyes, a blank surprise depicted on every feature of her countenance, and darting to her husband’s side, she leant heavily on his arm, gazed in his face with a look of serious entreaty, and exclaimed—“Oh! Reuben, Reuben, you surely do not mean to say that I am never to go out,—that, to please you and live in peace, I am to be buried alive like this.”

But, for once, Ashley was proof against beauty dissolved in tears, returned gaze for gaze, and, leading her to the couch, made her occupy a seat beside him, and then said, calmly and slowly: “understand, Lucy,—and mind I speak once for all,—whilst you *are* my wife you will never be allowed to attend such assemblies as these. Our ideas are quite opposed. I do not require you to yield yours in *every* point; but in many there must be a change. On your future conduct depends whether I shall treat you as a froward child, or pay you the respect due to you as a woman and as my wife.”

With a sudden wrench Lucy escaped her husband’s grasp, and, bounding to the other end of the room, exclaimed,—“Tyrant that you are, I defy you. I will go; for, if your wife, I am not your slave.”

“We shall see, madam,” exclaimed the Deacon; “we shall soon see whose will is law at the Oaklands.”

Had Lucy been a wise woman instead of a very silly one, she would have known that “discretion was the better part of valour;” and having taken Reuben for better for worse, have put up with all that followed. Not so our foolish Lucy. See her now in her mad, foolish passion; wrong, *so* wrong,

because she is Reuben's wife, and must submit whether she will or no. She hastily draws her writing-table before her, having first locked the door of her room to prevent intrusion, should Reuben follow her, for she is almost afraid of him ;—that cold, calm look appals her for a while. But she resolves to brave him, nevertheless ; scrawls a few hurried lines, and accepts the invitation.

The note written was immediately dispatched by her maid. Then Lucy looked over sundry articles, selecting several for her use at the ball ; bathed her eyes and throbbing temples with Eau de Cologne, put on her bonnet and mantle, and descended the staircase, just as the carriage drove to the hall door.

We had omitted to say that she had also sent a note to her dressmaker, requesting her to have ready for the following evening a ball dress of sky-blue crape with a slip of white satin, the skirt of the dress to be looped up with bunches of white roses and lilies of the valley.

Reuben was deceived. He saw that Lucy had been weeping violently, but not for a moment did he dream of open resistance to his will ; nevertheless, he started when she drew herself proudly aside when he volunteered comfortably to arrange her seat ; and, still wishful to reconcile her quietly to his will, offered her his hand, which she impatiently dashed aside, saying, with a defiant air,—

“Mind, Reuben, I shall attend Mrs. Mervin's ball.”

“Not another word, Lucy, if your temper be not changed,” replied the Deacon. “I have told you my mind about the matter.”

Their drive continued for the space of an hour and a half through sunny vales, by smiling meadows, and then round by the shores of the deep blue sea, with the lofty overhanging cliffs

on the opposite side ; they passed, too, in their way, Mrs. Clifton's closed cottage on the Babbicombe Road.

"Very poor, contrasted with Oaklands," thought Lucy, as she languidly reclined on the softly-cushioned seat of her elegant equipage. Yet there was a canker worm at her heart, which, spite of all her husband's fanaticism, a better, wiser woman would not have felt, even after committing the first wrong step. And so it was that the sun shone brightly, and the flowers bloomed, and all nature looked glad and joyous. Yet Lucy's heart was sad.

The stormy morning was succeeded by a day of sullenness and gloom, and in the evening the mistress of the mansion was in anything but a cheerful mood, wherewith to entertain a small party of Ashley's friends, amongst whom was the minister Hopley, who, our readers will remember, had been decidedly averse to the union of Lucy with the Deacon. The evening went off somewhat heavily, and the company were quite shrewd enough to be aware that there was cause for disunion between the newly-married pair, and many strictures not very favorable to Lucy were made, one to another, after the company had separated.

The following day Ashley and his wife maintained a sort of polite distant civility towards each other, the former not entertaining the most distant idea that any open rebellion to his authority was anticipated by the equally determined and resolute will of his wife.

In the evening Ashley as usual had taken his favorite seat beside a French window, looking out on the grassy sloping lawn beyond. Beneath the cliff on which Oaklands was situated flowed the blue waters of the ocean, the waves of which were silvered by the rays of the September moon. He had

enjoyed uninterrupted quiet, wine, and his cigar for more than an hour since his wife had left him, when, suddenly, the sound of carriage wheels struck upon his ear. He listened, expecting to hear the sound of advancing footsteps; but, no,—a light rustling sound like the flutter of a rich dress alone met his ear, and the next moment he distinctly heard carriage wheels drive through the avenue leading from the house. A sudden thought glanced across the Deacon's mind. *Could it be possible that Lucy had dared to brave him and go alone to the ball!* He would know the worst. So violently ringing the bell he desired the servant who answered the summons to tell his mistress he wanted her immediately.

A blank stare of surprise was on the man's face as he replied,—

“Mrs. Ashley has gone to the Elms, sir, to attend Mrs. Mervin's ball.

“Put horses to the brougham immediately,” said Ashley, in a voice hoarse with passion, and drive for your life, in order if possible to reach Mrs. Ashley before she arrives at the Elms.”

A very few minutes more and the Deacon was in full pursuit of his wife. He wished to save her and himself public exposure if possible, so dashed on at full speed. However, he failed to stop Lucy in time. On he drove to the gate of the Elms, and, amidst twenty other gay equipages, beheld his own, saw his wife alight ere he could descend from the brougham, and then when he could himself press through the throng of loiterers, beheld her ascend the stately staircase. On went Ashley, followed her to the very ante-room in which the guests assembled, laid his hand upon her shoulder with a strong but nervous grasp, and exclaimed—“Go back, madam

to Oaklands, the carriage still awaits you, and in future learn not to disobey my commands."

White as the handkerchief which she raised to her lips grew Lucy's countenance ; she leant heavily on his arm, strove to close her ears to the remarks and titters of the group around her, and was carried by him rather than walked down the staircase she had so gaily ascended a few moments before. Those who were thronging forward eagerly made way, for they fancied a lady had suddenly fainted, so that the enraged husband quickly reached his carriage, and deposited his now senseless burthen on the seat beside him.

"Drive quickly," he said to the coachman, "your mistress is ill."

Lucy had burst a blood-vessel ; a thin stream crimsoned the handkerchief she had held to her lips, and dyed the costly dress in which she had arranged herself for that night's triumph over her husband.

CHAPTER XI.

The soft rays of the harvest moon fell gently athwart the old-fashioned apartment in which Mrs. Clifton was seated, in company with Esther, Mildred, Captain Seymour, and his venerable father.

It was exactly one month since the death of Mrs. Seymour, and, under ordinary circumstances, the little trio, who had sought London for their pleasure alone, would not, perhaps, have been tempted to remain in a house in which so calamitous an event had taken place ; but the recognition so strangely brought about, whereby Mrs. Clifton discovered in the Cap-

tain her frivolous daughter's rejected suitor, whom she would have rejoiced to greet as her son-in-law, made her rather glad than otherwise that her steps should have been directed hither, at such a juncture in his affairs.

Kind words alone have a powerful influence with the sorrowful and suffering, how much more, then, kindly actions; and the distressed Captain experienced a wondrous consolation in the solicitude of the kind old friend who seemed to take the place of a mother in his regard, and who was so careful that the servants did not neglect the almost imbecile old gentleman, who so bitterly felt the loss of her who had been his partner for fifty long years and more.

Immediately after the funeral had taken place, the Captain decided that the large old house should be given up at the coming Michaelmas, resolving to place his father during the term of his absence from home in some respectable family, in which his comforts would be duly cared for; and the evening prior to the day fixed for the departure of Mrs. Clifton and her friends having arrived, the somewhat melancholy party had assembled to spend the evening together.

It may be readily imagined that Captain Seymour was not very eager to converse about Lucy, or her prospects, aware as he was that his overtures of marriage had been rejected because his purse was not as long as that of his rival—Ashley, therefore it was that he had restricted his remarks to mere common-place enquiries concerning her health.

However, it so happened that, on the morning of that day, Mrs. Clifton had received a letter from Mr. Ashley, requesting her immediate return to the Oaklands, informing her of the dangerous illness of Lucy; and though he by no means explained the affair, still enough was said to satisfy

the unhappy mother that this sudden and dangerous illness had had its origin in some matrimonial quarrel.

It so happened, then, that Mrs. Clifton, fretting the whole day in bitter vexation of spirit over Lucy's wayward conduct, which, in her rejection of Seymour, and her immediately afterwards encouraging the addresses of Ashley, whose opinions were so diametrically opposed to her own, led to so much future misery, could not keep her peace on this, as she then thought, last evening with the Captain, but poured forth the full tale of her distress to him, though we doubt whether, simple as the good lady really was, she would have made him cognisant of these unfortunate differences, had she not been aware of the naturally noble qualities of his mind. In good truth, Seymour's was not the nature to exult over the fate of the frivolous Lucy, whose fair bright face came before his mind's eye, as of yore, as her mother spoke, and he felt sad at the thought of the unhappiness she had so recklessly brought upon herself; yet, the next moment the remembrance of what he had suffered, in the rejection of his suit, steeled his heart, and Mrs. Clifton would have said even more, but held her peace from a fear of giving pain to Esther, who at that moment re-entered the room; and as the Captain's glance fell on her sweet and expressive countenance, a strange thought shot athwart his mind, passing, as it were, with the quickness of electricity to that of Mrs. Clifton's, as her eye fell on both, and also communicating an unpleasant sensation at the same time. "What, indeed!" So ran the widow's train of ideas. "What, if Everard Seymour woo and win the daughter of him for whom he was rejected by Lucy."

It needed not for the Captain to express himself more positively than he had already done as to his admiration—

which was unbounded in the highest degree—of Esther Ashley ; her fortitude on the night of his mother's death ; her accomplishments, her beauty, had long been the theme of his conversation ; and Mrs. Clifton instinctively felt that, in Esther, Lucy's loss would be, indeed, more than made up, nor could she hide from herself the fact, that there was little happiness to be expected at the Oaklands, where Esther must reside if she did not return to Minerva Hall, an abominable alternative, as the good lady herself considered it ; and, in this event, Mrs. Clifton well knew that two opposing elements would immediately war with each other. Good, too, as was her disposition, she not unnaturally felt an aversion to beholding the amiable Esther occupy the place her frivolous daughter had resigned ; added to which, the question of religion would assuredly come in, and, *as assuredly* would Reuben refuse his consent to his daughter's nuptials.

" Will another union in the same family, made up of such adverse elements, come to pass ? " thought she, as later in the evening they separated, Captain Seymour reminding her that he should be ready at the appointed hour to escort herself and her friends to the railway station.

The little party had passed a sad though at the same time a pleasant evening, and Mildred and Mrs. Clifton immediately withdrew to their rooms, to busy themselves, for sundry preparations, for the journey of the ensuing morning, leaving Esther collecting together her music and books.

Three hours had passed away, and Mrs. Clifton, hitherto unmindful of the lapse of time, continued packing, and only when her work was over did she remember an article she had forgotten, and softly descended the stairs leading to the drawing-room ; but her gentle step was heard by none, and

The wondering Mrs. Clifton beheld by the strong light of the moon—for the lamp had long since expired—Esther's music and books still littering the table as when she left the room, and the tall slender form of her young friend leaning against the window, clad in her night dress.

An exclamation of surprise was about to burst from Mrs. Clifton's lips, but it died away as her gaze fell on Esther; the large soft blue eyes were fixed on vacancy, her hair hung over her shoulders, and the traces of tears still remained on the pallid cheeks. Never before had Mrs. Clifton beheld any one in a state of somnambulism, and in such she felt certain Esther was plunged. But, hark! she speaks; and, irresolute for the moment how to act, Mrs. Clifton drew aside and listened to the words of the fair somnambulist.

"Nay, father," she said, "send me not away, because you have married Lucy, that frivolous Lucy. I will be as submissive as you could wish, let me but stay at the Oaklands then." Mrs. Clifton drew aside, for the tall pale form glided from the window and rapidly paced the room, and, to her astonishment, the name of Everard Seymour fell upon her ear.

"He is good, sensible, intelligent; *he has told* me this night he shall ask my hand in marriage if I consent;—why let religion be a barrier?—must not that be good which has made him virtuous and self-denying? Besides, has not this short four months' residence with *her* mother destroyed the foolish prejudices in which I have been brought up?—am I not already more than half his own way of thinking?—yet, my father is stern, and firm in his own opinion, and, much I fear, he will turn a deaf ear to Everard's suit. Yet, never mind," she added, "only let me stay at the Oaklands

and I will be so patient, so resigned to all I feel I shall be called on to endure, that, ere long, I am sure I shall win my point."

Then pausing, she pushed back her long hair, and her night dress almost brushed the gown of Mrs. Clifton, who had scarce time to draw aside to allow her to pass, as she retraced her steps to her own chamber.

In much distress the good lady watched the retreating form of Esther, and she listened anxiously at the door, in order to satisfy herself that she had really retired to rest, ere she returned to her own apartment.

Sleep, however, visited not the worthy lady's pillow that night, until three hours' weary watching had elapsed, and then she fell only into broken and disturbed slumbers.

Her worst surmises had been verified, and Everard had, it would appear, if the colloquy of Esther in her state of somnambulism were to be credited, already made profession of his attachment for her.

Indeed, she could not well have come before him in a more captivating form; her fortitude whilst alone with his dying mother, and the way in which she had discharged the last sad offices, had won his esteem, and that esteem had ripened into affection, doubtless, as he contemplated her in all the gentleness of her nature, willing to become the *second* person in her father's home, no longer the heiress, as she had hitherto been considered; for, from her father's union with Lucy, another family was almost sure to spring. But the step-daughter of a young woman but a few years older than herself, and immeasurably her inferior in every respect, conscious, too, that even this alternative might not, perhaps, be left her, but that, at Lucy's will, she was exposed to the

chance of being sent back to a dreaded residence at Minerva Hall.

Mrs. Clifton also feared lest Esther was aware that Everard had made proposals to her daughter which had been rejected; and she felt, naturally, no small pain at the remembrance of the term the former had applied to Lucy, conscious, as she now was, that, in her state of somnambulism, she had spoken out her heart's most inner sentiments.

CHAPTER XII.

The following morning Esther appeared at the early hour appointed for breakfast, with the traces of mental anxiety on her expressive countenance; and, profiting by her withdrawal from the room a few moments before her departure, the Captain drew Mrs. Clifton aside, and said—"I wish to tell you, my dear madam, before you leave London, that it is my intention to ask his daughter's hand in marriage of Mr. Ashley. I have studied carefully the character of your young friend, and find it all that could be desired. May I hope for your kind aid in the furtherance of my suit."

For one moment the worthy Mrs. Clifton felt a pang of sorrow at her heart, but she was too right-minded to allow her regrets to influence her in the performance of her duty; so, extending her hand to the Captain, she said,—“Command my services in any way you think proper, Captain Seymour; I only regret that, instead of your becoming my friend, I cannot claim a nearer interest in you; but we cannot retrieve the past; and my thoughtless Lucy must pay

the penalty of her folly. But, do you think you may venture to hope that such a man as Ashley will receive your addresses for his daughter?—that he will ever accept you, Catholic as you are, as the husband of Esther?"

"Why not?" replied Everard; "has he not himself wedded a Catholic bride?"

"The cases are in no way similar," rejoined the widow. "Lucy, unfortunately, has nothing practical or earnest in her character. Ashley, no doubt, observed this; for, I am quite confident, that, though she belong to the Church of England, he would never have espoused such a woman as our good friend Mildred, for instance. We must, therefore, bear in remembrance, that he may have, very probably, considered that he had soft ground to work upon, and that he could easily mould Lucy to his will; furthermore, as he is the superior party, he can force compliance. We will hope the best, but I fear much you will encounter a refusal; and, again, if, as is not improbable, he has heard that you, my dear Everard, ever honored Lucy with an offer, may not this even act as an incentive for his refusing your addresses to his daughter? I need not," she added, "ask you if Esther be favorable, as I was the unseen witness of a painful scene last night, which let me into her secret."

Mrs. Clifton then narrated to Captain Seymour what she had heard the previous night, and, after describing the distress she had evinced at the idea of a return to Minerva Hall, she added, "I think it would be best not to seek Mr. Ashley for some little time; if he discountenances your addresses he will be immediately furnished with a plea for sending Esther from home."

It was then arranged that the Captain should make another voyage ere he introduced himself to Mr. Ashley, and

that on his return, which would be during the ensuing summer, he should at once settle with his father at Mrs. Clifton's house, so that matters might be planned in such a way as to ensure his frequently seeing Mr. Ashley, and thus becoming on intimate terms with him.

They had just made this decision when Esther appeared, and Mrs. Clifton taking her by the hand exclaimed,

"I have learned your secret, Esther, love, and will do all that lies in my power to further the views of Captain Seymour and yourself; but, avoid precipitation. You wish to remain at the Oaklands; you dread nothing so much as what I may term the imprisonment meditated for you at Minerva Hall. Remember, then, that the religious principles of Captain Seymour stand in his way; very likely the offer of his hand for you will meet with a discourteous rejection, and your immediate dismissal from your home. I have then given my advice to Everard; it is, that he seek not your father, prejudiced as he is, till you have secured yourself in your now proper place—at *home*, and, at the same time, as he is daily expecting promotion in the naval service, *he* may also acquire another chance of making himself acceptable."

"Let it all be as you both think best," said Esther, ever pliant and docile even when things went against her will; and, putting one little hand in that of the worthy Captain, and passing her right arm around the waist of Mrs. Clifton, she said, "I shall count the hours, for I can rely on no happy home, alas, at the Oaklands; but I will bear the olive branch of peace, if they will but let me stay; and, later, when I have a home of my own, ah! all shall be so bright and joyous, that life shall be for us one sweet holiday."

Poor Esther! she had many bitters to taste ere her ideas

of a happy home were realized ; but there was something inexpressibly touching in the *naivete* of her manner ; her arch looks, the perfect simplicity of her character, its almost childish *abandon*, though, at the same time, it was utterly removed from frivolity and silliness. Mrs. Clifton's heart ached as she noted the contrast between Esther and Lucy, and she imprinted a warm kiss on the cheek of her young friend ; whilst the gallant Captain carried to his lips that small white hand which had been placed within his own.

A few moments more and the last adieux were spoken, and, amid the bustle and noise of the railway station, the three ladies took their places in one of the first-class carriages. The bell rang, but still Everard Seymour lingered ; but the mighty engine puffed and shrieked, the train was set in motion, and the Captain was at length fain to return, lonely and depressed, to his now solitary home.

CHAPTER XIII.

Strange enough it was, and yet true, that the very person whose friendship Lucy cared not to cultivate when in the pride of her strength and the hey-day of prosperity and pleasure, was the one to whom her heart now turned when life and its gaieties seemed for the time to be passing away. It was some time ere she could be restored to consciousness on the night to which we have alluded ; the thin stream of her very life blood dyed with its crimson tinge the white coverlid of the bed on which she was placed, and her husband, now too late, regretted that he had allowed her frivolity and rebellion to his wishes to exasperate him to such

a length as to cause him to hurry her away from the Elms, and already accused himself as the author of her death, which he apprehended would shortly take place.

The doctor, a sedate, grave man, looked graver than usual as he gazed at his watch, and noted the weak pulsation, pressed his fingers on the small wrist of his patient, who now looked too delicately beautiful for earth.

In this state of trembling anxiety some three hours had passed away, when, the hemorrhage having ceased to flow, the patient fell into a quiet sleep, the anxious attendants still watching with unremitting assiduity beside her bed. Thus wore away the early hours of the night, when a slight movement attracted the notice of the watchful husband.

A faint sign with the half-raised hand brought him to her side, and hastening forwards, he bent down and whispered,

"I am sorry I removed you so hastily from the Elms, Lucy; henceforth let there be no invitations accepted which I do not approve, and I on my part will try and bear better than I have done to-night, with your weakness."

Alas! poor Ashley!—in vain did he listen, not a word of regret escaped the lips of Lucy, who surely should have answered him by an acknowledgment of error; but, no,—“My mother!” were the only words she gasped forth, and then, after a moment’s pause, she said,—

“Rosa Harcourt, send for her at once.”

Now, it so happened that Mr. Ashley had never heard Rosa’s name till now, and he had to enquire as to who she was, and where she lived, and wait some few moments before he met with his reply; and then the broken sentence—“Grove Villa, Dawlish!” was all the news that he obtained.

But the night had far advanced, and the Deacon rightly postponed arousing the lady till the light of another day had for some hours dawned, and then a messenger arrived with a brief note containing a few hurried words explaining that Mrs. Ashley had suddenly been seized with a dangerous illness, and requested the favor of a visit from Miss Rosa Harcourt.

It was with no small astonishment that the sisters received the note from the Oaklands, for they knew but little of Lucy, and that little had failed to inspire them with respect, for there was, alas! nothing in her character worthy of admiration; however, the Harcourts were ever ready to assist others, and in a very little time Rosa had started on her journey, leaving her sister marvelling at the summons she had received.

A ghastly sight, indeed, did Lucy present, and Rosa started involuntarily at the change, for she remembered her only in all the pride of her beauty and strength, as she was before her marriage. She waved her hand for her maid to retire, and then signing to Rosa to come close to her side, she whispered, for the power to speak audibly was yet not her's,—

“I thank you very much, Miss Harcourt, for the kindness which has made you grant my request; there are many ladies whom I know far better than yourself, but none whom I could have taken such a liberty with, as to have asked them to stay with me till my mother arrives; yet, this liberty I take with you.”

Rosa had not contemplated a stay of more than a few hours, and foresaw certain difficulties in her way; but, as she was already at the Oaklands, there was no help but

to finish the work she had commenced, and she expressed her perfect willingness to do all in her power for the invalid.

But how shocked was Rosa to find that *she* was to be selected as the confidant of the sick lady's griefs, which were, after all, as much imaginary as real? How grieved was she to discover that the root of the evil lay, after all, in the mixed marriage system,—in the fact that Reuben Ashley's stiff rigid views of propriety, which were to him as part of his creed, never could coincide with those held by his wife, who, silly and weak-minded as she was, because *she* could not discover a sin where *he* did, in attending a ball or a theatre, had not the sense or the good taste to yield.

Even Lucy's own telling of her tale, varnished over as it was by the sophistry self-love never fails to lend, could not blind Rosa to the fact that the young wife was seriously in fault, and she shuddered for the future; as, ill and feeble as she was, Lucy, nevertheless, gasped forth words of anger at what she termed Reuben's cant, and morose disposition, which she neither could nor would allow to be the guide of her conduct.

A somewhat warm reception did Rosa meet with from Mr. Ashley, for, bigotted and prejudiced as he was, he, nevertheless, respected Rosa for her ready acquiescence to his request, and was ever too much of a gentleman to be uncourteous or rude under any circumstances.

The shades of the September evening were falling, and Rosa had dispatched a messenger to Dawlish, warning her sister Amelia of her continued absence, whilst she herself sat beside the sick couch, ministering to the wants of the invalid, and endeavouring, as far as she could do so without causing irritation, to point out that, having married Ashley, there was now nothing to be done but to obey him in all things in which

there was not sin ; and whilst she was thus employed above, a scene was enacting in the apartment below which was amusing enough in its way.

Ashley was alone, puffing away at his cigar, his mind intent on the scene of the previous evening, angry with himself that he had exposed his wife before a throng of curious strangers, and that he had been the indirect cause of Lucy's dangerous illness, and yet firmly resolved that, in the point of amusement he would have his own way, and waxing wrath as he thought over the *amende honorable* he had made to her, to which she had failed to respond, when the entrance of the minister, Jabez Hopley, put an end to his reverie.

"I am sorry to hear that Mrs. Ashley is dangerously ill," were the first words of the latter ; "and especially sorry for the cause of her illness. My worst apprehensions have been fully verified."

The Deacon puffed away more vehemently than ever, to hide, if possible, his anger, which began to rise at what he deemed an unwarrantable interference with his affairs on the part of the minister ; and, assuming a calmness he was far from feeling, he replied,—

"And pray, Mr. Hopley, how might you have discovered the cause of Mrs. Ashley's illness ? I opine my wife is not the only person who has had the misfortune to be taken dangerously ill in a dancing room, where, by the way, she had no business to be."

"Why, Ashley, it was the talk of the whole town within an hour after the event took place, and except a few of the elders of the meeting, the judgment of all is against you. They prate already of a tyrant husband preventing his wife taking a little harmless amusement, and say, that your violence in the way in which you publicly exposed and dragged

her from the Elms, occasioned the rupture of a blood vessel, and that she is still considered in a most dangerous state."

"Let them babble as they will," replied Ashley, "I care not. I only know, that no wife of mine shall enter a dancing room with my knowledge. I do not imagine Lucy will venture on such a step again after the lesson of last night."

"But see you not, Ashley, that this evil comes from your marriage with a maiden merely for her comely countenance, in good truth, I mind not so much her being a Romanist, as her not being one of our own way of thinking in other matters; for, had you married any other girl not brought up in our own strict way, the result would have been the same, for the young heart would soon turn after gay shows, theatrical mummeries, waltzing, and the like; and, in fact, her Papistry goes not very deep, for she attends her Popish chapel but seldom, I believe. But, what mean you to do with Esther? I know," added the minister, anxious to interrupt Ashley, whom he saw was about to speak; "I know a God-fearing, well-to-do young man, the son of Deacon Walford, who, you are aware, is going on one of our missions shortly, and who wishes to have a wife to accompany him.—Wilt let him have Esther, my good friend? He saw the maiden when she was last at the Oaklands, and his father tells me Ephraim inclines much towards her. Walford, you know, is rich. Would it not be well, now, to mate these two together, and thus save Esther from imbibing any of her step-mother's principles?"

"I shall send Esther for two years more to the school at Clapham," drily remarked the Deacon. "You are premature, friend Hopley, and so is Walford. How knows he that Esther will like his son?"

"For the matter of that," replied the minister, "I give you

credit, Ashley, for too much good sense to be over-squeamish about the girl's fancies, as you know the chief and most important affairs are well looked after, which consist in both parties being minded the same way, both brought up with the same views, the same antipathies and prejudices, if you so please to designate them ; and that, as to worldly matters, each will be alike blessed with the gifts of fortune ; for, friend Walford is well able to supply Ephraim with worldly means, as you are Esther. And I can see in such an union nothing left to wish for."

"But what on earth has brought *you* here on such an errand ?" replied the Deacon, taking up another cigar, and pushing the wine to his companion.

"Even at the request of my friend, Walford, backed by Ephraim himself," said the minister. "Ephraim is but little known to you, not having been long amongst us ; and, aware as they both are that my friendship leads me to the Oaklands almost daily, whom could they more rightly select to speak on such a matter ?"

The Deacon remained buried in thought for a few moments, during which he was asking himself if it would not be well, and a good thing, to see Esther the wife of the young missionary, in whose missionary labors she would thus become associated, in fact. He knew Esther had no *affaire de cœur*, and even if such had been the case,—what then ? She must conform herself to his wishes. A good establishment for life presented itself ; he should not let it slip by. But, far too shrewd to allow his friends, Hopley and Walford, to suppose that he caught over eagerly at their proposal, he said,—

"It is, as I have already said, my intention to send Esther back to school for the next two years ; but, tell Ephraim, I

shall be glad to see him. He can visit here; and we will see if there be any chance that the liking will become mutual."

"Monstrous, monstrous, friend Ashley," replied the minister, "to think of sending a girl like Esther to attain her twentieth year in a school-room! However, Ephraim will have the honor of making her acquaintance; and, if I mistake not, your mind will change about the school."

Inwardly well pleased with the hope each entertained of bringing about the proposed union, the minister and the Deacon separated. As to the question of whether Esther would approve of the matrimonial scheme, neither of the gentlemen gave it seriously a moment's reflection. How strangely they overlooked the fact that a mere union of hands and not of hearts, though principle and prejudice might be the same, would lead to as much unhappiness in wedded life as that already led at the Oaklands.

CHAPTER XIV.

In due time Mrs. Clifton arrived at the Oaklands, accompanied by Esther, Miss Vernon locating herself in her friend's old house. She was much shocked at the change in her daughter's appearance, little less so on discovering the terms in which the newly-married pair lived together, and immediately set to work, as far as lay in her power, to correct the evil.

By very slow degrees did Lucy recover her health, but many months had to pass away ere strength was again her's: so she had, perforce, to reconcile herself to bidding farewell to the hope she had indulged in of leading a round of dissipa-

tion. It was with no small pleasure that Mrs. Clifton and Ashley beheld the time approach in which she would become a mother, hoping that the coming of the little stranger would prove an antidote to the overweening love of dissipation, the hoped-for enjoyment of which had had so much to do with the marriage of Lucy with Ashley.

So long had been the period of her illness, so tardy her recovery, that winter had passed away in the confinement of her sick room, and spring already unfolded its first green buds ere she once more descended to the dining-room at the Oaklands, and ere that time she had given birth to a female child.

Esther had made herself necessary to the comfort of the household during the five months that had elapsed. But, had she been at peace? Ah! no;—a return to Minerva Hall loomed over her on the one hand, on the other, marriage with the detested Ephraim Walford. Only by slow degrees had she become aware of the extent of the trials that awaited her. She had managed the housekeeping department far better than her father's unskilled wife would ever do; and during the period of Lucy's long confinement in the sick room, she had not felt the full painfulness of her position, as she must inevitably do hereafter. Of her father's views with regard to Ephraim Walford she had only lately hazarded an opinion, little deeming that it was in prospect to give away her hand without her own free will, and she now counted with feverish uneasiness the months which must yet pass away ere the return of Captain Seymour from his voyage.

Lucy's child had been baptized a Catholic,—in this point Reuben had not broken his word, though he satisfied his conscience by resolving that this should not be the case with the next child should it prove a son, and, indeed, thought Mrs. Clifton, as she held the child at the baptismal font,—between

the Methodism of the father, and the sad want of practical religion in the mother, there is but little chance that it will grow up a zealous Catholic.

And Lucy now moved about again, the mistress of her household. Esther, meek and gentle as she is, unrepiningly resigned the temporary authority with which she had been invested, though we will not go so far as to say that such resignation did not cost her a pang, especially when she regarded her youthful step-mother in the place of the parent she had lost.

A few of Ashley's most intimate friends were invited immediately after Lucy's removal down stairs, to celebrate her recovery, and amongst them was Ephraim,—whom we now, for the first time, introduce to our readers,—at an evening party at the Oaklands; though Esther had had the inestimable pleasure of making his acquaintance conferred upon her some time since.

Tall and spare in person was Ephraim, his features somewhat irregular, but not unpleasing in their general expression; his manners, however, were awkward, and not calculated to attract such a girl as Esther. At the present moment his company was sought after, as he was considered clever, and particularly pious and earnest, and regarded as likely to prove one of the most able of the missionaries about to be sent out to India.

Many an anxious heart, too, was beating amongst the marriageable ladies at the Tabernacle, who were ardently hoping that the young minister would make an offer of his hand ere the hour of his departure arrived, for the negotiation between Hopley and the Deacon had been kept a strict secret between themselves.

On this evening, however, one month before the time fixed

for the departure of Ephraim, the attentions he paid to Esther were so marked,—to the young lady herself painfully so,—that it was clear she alone was thought of as destined to be the companion of the minister in his future labors in a distant land. He monopolized her whole attention, and when wearied of seeing him ever at her side, she seized the first opportunity of escape, by stealing to the conservatory, to enjoy at the same time relief from the heat and noise of the crowded apartment and emancipation from the soft nonsense Ephraim had been pouring in her ear.

An apprehension of impending evil shot across Esther's mind, she feared some misfortune was about to befall her, and she stood buried in thought, leaning against the open door of the conservatory, leading by a flight of steps to the garden beneath, and carelessly plucking the flowers of a beautiful geranium.

She had destroyed, in her abstraction, its brightest blossoms, when a step near her attracted her attention, and she experienced an unpleasant sensation on discovering that Ephraim Walford had followed her thither; and he now detained her whilst he poured forth his protestations of attachment, and begged her permission to request of her father a formal sanction of his addresses.

At one glance Esther beheld the maze of difficulties in which she was plunged, but, she felt aware that she must brave the worst, and, thanking him for the honor he had intended her, she intimated that it was not her wish at present to change her state.

Esther was, however, little prepared for the scene which followed, nor for the pertinacity with which Ephraim urged his suit; and it was with no small dread she heard him declare that, "he was confident of her father's assent," adding,

"I am also confident that the offer of my hand would not be so declined, Miss Ashley, had not some person already engaged your affections."

It was with no small pleasure that Esther at this moment heard the sound of footsteps, and the voice of Lucy was just then as music to her ears, for, it enabled her to beat a retreat, and escape further molestation from Ephraim, by hastening to join the assembled guests.

Hastily, too, did Esther seek her apartment after they had departed, but not to rest, for she spent an anxious, wakeful night, revolving in her mind the conjecture as to whether there had really been any underhand dealing or not between her father and Ephraim, and trembling for the issue, if such really were the case.

The next evening realised her fears, for the hour had approached which the Deacon usually gave to wine and the cigar, enjoying himself after what he termed the day's work, though in what it consisted any one but himself would be at a loss to guess. At this time he generally eschewed conversing on any topic at all irritating, and Esther, who had watched him throughout the day, nervously anxious to ascertain if anything had passed with Ephraim which had angered her father against her, began at last to feel secure and easy. She had, too, watched his countenance, on his arriving home after his afternoon's absence, but beheld it unclouded, and, moreover, felt additional security on finding that he had turned his steps in a different direction to that in which lay the residence of Mr. Walford.

Esther, however, girl as she still was, was not aware of the imperturbable nature of her father's disposition, or the power he possessed of veiling his own feelings; yet, she desired to avoid conversation with him, from an innate con-

sciousness that Ephraim's name would be brought on the *tapis*. But, even if the subject were not introduced by her father, she felt she could not many hours longer avoid mention of Ephraim's proposals herself.

Thus it was that she rose from the table much earlier than usual, and was about to leave the room, when her father, in so imperative a tone as to cause Lucy to look up with astonishment, desired her to remain; and, fixing his eyes steadfastly on his daughter's countenance, he exclaimed, drawing a seat towards him:

"Be seated, Esther, I wish to have a little conversation with you."

Esther mechanically dropped into the chair Ashley had drawn towards him, conscious that the hour of her trial had approached. She was no heroine, but a weak, timid girl, the powers of whose mind had yet to be called into full play. What wonder, then, that she quailed beneath the stern glance and lowering brow of her father, who read in her pale face and downcast look, an answer to the suspicions he entertained.

"It is nine months, Esther," began the Deacon, in a most calm and imperturbable tone, "since you came to the Oaklands; and, in consequence of your mother's illness and her long protracted recovery, your stay here has been much prolonged to what I had intended. You are aware that my determination was to send you for two years more to Minerva Hall; however, matters have so turned out that my mind is somewhat changed. In fact,—to speak plainly,—I found you had made a favorable impression on the mind of a most honored and godly young friend. Ephraim Walford has made you an offer of his hand. Now, tell me, Esther, why have you rejected such an offer?"

Esther sat for one moment motionless, with pale face and

parted lips, wishful, yet afraid, to speak. Lucy, who had been invested with the dignity of mother, played with her chain, and bent an unsympathising look on the poor trembling girl before her, and the Deacon puffed his cigar more vehemently than ever, as he always did whilst trying to appear calm, when he was unusually excited.

Esther dared not look up, she knew that cold light-grey eye was bent steadfastly on her countenance,—she dreaded her father's wrath,—*she* never had encountered it herself, but she remembered exhibitions of his violence on the mother who had passed to her rest,—and it was only when the soft, measured tones of the Deacon fell again upon her ear—so measured, that she knew his calmness was only assumed to veil the anger which was lashing itself into fury—that she plucked up courage to reply.

"Esther, I await your answer," continued the Deacon. "Why have you rejected the addresses of my friend—Ephraim?"

"I do not wish to marry. I cannot love Ephraim Walford, papa," exclaimed Esther, holding one hand on her heart, whilst, with the other, she nervously pushed aside a little dog, which—a favorite in its way—laid claim to her notice.

"Now, no excitement, Esther," said the Deacon, noticing the gesture; "my question is not answered yet. You have not told me the real reason of your rejection of a most worthy man's addresses. There is something in the back-ground, my daughter, and there must be no concealments on this point. *I* approve of Ephraim. You will understand that he is rich, and better far than rich, he is a good and pious minister. My brightest hope has been to see you his wife,—to see you go with him to other climes,—to see you associated with him in all holy labors. You are not old enough or wise

enough to judge what is best for yourself. Ephraim is not yet quite discouraged. Uncourteous as was your rejection, he will be here again to-morrow, when I expect you to receive him as an accepted suitor."

Esther rose from her seat; the girl was suddenly transformed into a woman. And, still with one hand on her heart, whilst with the other she leaned for support against her chair, she replied :

" My father, this must not be ; I *never* can be the wife of Ephraim Walford. Let me not for this earn your displeasure."

" *Must not be !*" said the Deacon, slowly repeating his daughter's words. " Why, what folly has turned your brain, Esther ?—Pray, who has taught you to set up your will in opposition to mine ? Now, *I* will tell you what you will do," he added, and he grasped Esther's right arm with no tender hand : " you will spend the rest of the evening in your chamber ; think over what I have said ; remember that it is my will you have to follow ; and become Ephraim's bride with a good heart ;—otherwise ——."

" Spare me," exclaimed Esther, now bursting into tears. " You will not, surely, insist on my marrying Ephraim, when my hand cannot be accompanied with my heart."

" And to whom has this heart of yours been given, Esther ?" replied the Deacon. " Pray, *what* prior engagement, most dutiful of daughters, has made away with this inestimable prize ? When did you chance to forget that you were a mere boarding-school Miss, who had no right to think of having a heart to give yet awhile, much less, of having one to give without her father's permission ? Now, out with the truth at once," he added, gradually losing control of his temper, and forcing the terrified girl on her knees as he spoke.

" You not leave this room till you have confessed the truth. When and to whom did you dare dispose of this precious appendage of yours without my knowledge or consent ?"

Esther was silent. Her father spoke the words she would fain, but dare not, utter ; and, in accents choked with rage, he hissed forth the name of Seymour.

" Captain Seymour is the favored one—is he not, minion ? —Everard Seymour ! with whom you became acquainted during your three months residence in London last autumn. Well, then, for your *great* satisfaction know, that I have written to Captain Seymour, in answer to a letter I have received from him, flatly refusing to allow him to pay his addresses to you ; adding, that had I not higher and better views for you, no power on earth should make me give my consent to my child's union with a professedly practical Papist. Now, to your room ; and, before you see me again, study the lesson of obedience I intend to exact."

Esther hastily rose from her knees sensitively alive to her father's injustice, and she exclaimed,—

" Yet hear me, my father. Be it yours to forbid my union with Captain Seymour, whose noble qualities have won my admiration, nay, my love. I am yet but young, and will obey you. But here my obedience stops ; for, *never* will I wed with Ephraim Walford."

" Do you dare brave me to my very face ?" replied the Deacon ; and, extending his powerful hand, he hurled her from him with such violence, that poor Esther fell with great weight on the floor, and her forehead coming in contact with a heavy piece of furniture, she struck it so severe a blow, that she was for some time deprived of consciousness.

CHAPTER XV.

When Esther recovered she found herself placed on the couch in the adjoining room, Mrs. Ashley's maid busily employed in stanching the blood which yet flowed freely from the wound she had received, and Lucy herself assisting with the aid of burnt feathers, salts, and Eau de Cologne, in restoring suspended animation.

As soon as the maid had bandaged up poor Esther's wound the latter, leaning on her arm, and accompanied by Lucy, sought her own chamber; and when she had entered it Mrs. Ashley immediately dismissed the attendant, and volunteered her services to assist Esther to prepare for the repose which, yet early in the evening as it was, she so sorely needed.

"It is an ugly wound, Esther," exclaimed Lucy. "What a pity you provoked your father so much, child. Pray how long may you have known this Captain Seymour?—How shockingly indiscreet for a young lady like you to entertain *une grande passionne* without the knowledge of her friends?"

"My best and only friend, your mother, Mrs. Ashley, knew from the first moment of its taking place—of my attachment to Captain Seymour," said Esther.

"Silly girl," exclaimed Lucy, biting her lips, and affecting to be very busily employed in arranging the curtains, and adjusting the pillows beneath poor Esther's throbbing head; "how could you be so foolish as to suppose your father would ever consent to your marriage with a Catholic?—think better

of it, Esther ; learn a lesson of prudence from to-night ; forswear the Captain ; and, like a sensible, obedient girl, become Mrs. Walford. Now, I will tell you something more," she added, seeing that Esther was about to speak ; and, deliberately drawing a chair beside the bed, she quietly seated herself. " Will you listen : believe me when I tell you, you will return at once to Minerva Hall unless you obey your father's will."

" I am not a child, Mrs. Ashley, to be frightened into compliance by a threat," rejoined Esther, her pale cheek becoming flushed by irritation. I tell you once for all, no cruelty on the part of my father, and no persecution on yours, shall force me to become Ephraim Walford's wife."

" But, Esther, you can surely not expect happiness in such an union," urged Lucy ; " remember Captain Seymour is a strict Catholic ; he'll not suffer wife of his to go to meeting, if half that I have heard of him be true ; all your fine theory of happiness will soon vanish, I can tell you. Come, now, be frank ; have you ever thought of this ?"

" Yes, I have," said Esther. " I have determined to cast aside prejudice, not to consider the faith which Seymour professes to be the mass of superstition I have been led to believe till I have examined for myself ; and if, as I yet hope, the way in which I have been brought up is right, he is too good, and his character too noble, to make him interfere with me."

A sharp pang shot across Lucy's heart as Esther spoke thus. She was not happy herself, and why should Esther be happy ? She rose to depart. But, there was another shot to fire yet ; so, as she bent over Lucy to imprint a cold kiss on her cheek, which carried with it no affection, she said,—

" And what of your children, pious Esther ?—Have you given a thought to those little ones who may spring up around

you?—If you have not, your father has; and, for your own sake, for your own well-being, I shall advise him to send you at once to Minerva Hall."

As the unfeeling, scheming Lucy spoke thus she left the room, and poor Esther, fairly overcome, wept long and violently. "She will do all in her power," she said to herself, "to get me sent back to that odious boarding-school. Alas! alas!—here in my own father's house I am not wanted; and, because I will not marry where I have no heart to give, am to be treated like a child."

But, ere long, poor Esther's head throbbed, from the mental anxiety under which she suffered, quite as much as from the cruel blow she had received; and we will leave her in the feverish, restless slumber, into which she at length fell, and follow Lucy to the drawing-room.

The evening air was chill, and a pleasant fire burned briskly in the stove; the lamps were lighted; and the appointments of the room were as costly as wealth could make them. But the beautiful young wife was sorely vexed at the event of that night. The Deacon had strode from the room without vouchsafing a look to Esther, after her unlucky fall, and Lucy now reclined in a luxurious easy-chair, with the soft rays of the shaded lamp falling on her beautiful features; and, her *petite* figure, her white hands clasped nervously together, and her lips—now parted, now compressed—telling of the storm within her bosom, and now, the victim of ambition murmured out such words as these:—

"Is it true, then?—that Everard whom I refused only because I thought him too poor a match, really seeks this girl's hand. Well, then, if it be, indeed, a sin to wed for gold, I could have no greater punishment than thus to have him cross my path again. But I have my part to play, Esther,' she

added. “ I never intended to have you in my way ;—I will have no step-daughter, nearly of my own age, for ever at my side ; therefore, I will take care to hasten your departure to Clapham as soon as may be, if, indeed, your obstinate refusal of Ephraim continues, and you have the boldness to thwart your father in his angry mood.” In some such way as this, occasionally venting her anger half aloud, and then musing in silence, Lucy remained for more than an hour ; but at last the tenor of her thoughts changed ; fear seized her heart when she remembered the scene of the evening. She had been aware, indeed, from the night when, against his will, she had attended Mrs. Mervin’s ball, of the determined nature of her husband’s spirit ; but she had yet to know that he could so far forget himself as to raise his hand ; and when she thought of the wound his brutality had been the cause of inflicting on Esther’s temple, she shuddered for herself.

She still sat ruminating thus when she heard Ashley’s step, and the next moment he entered the drawing-room.

“ Where is Esther ?” was his curt remark.

“ I helped her to her bed-room long since,” replied Lucy. “ She was much hurt by the fall when you threw her from you so violently ; there was a large wound near the temple.”

“ Indeed, I am not sorry,” said the Deacon. “ She will see I am not to be trifled with.”

“ Brute,” thought his wife ; not, however, so much out of sympathy with Esther as fear for herself, for she saw that Ashley was a man before whose will all must bow, or suffer.

“ Esther accepts the hand of my friend, Ephraim, or returns to Clapham within three days,” he resumed. “ You will tell her this to-morrow morning.”

Mrs. Ashley nodded an assent, and had relapsed into her former train of thought, while her husband paced up and

down the room ; when, as if a sudden thought had occurred, he paused before his wife, and placing his hand on her shoulder, whilst he steadfastly regarded her, he exclaimed,—

“ I have a question to put to you, madam. I wish to ask, why it was that when I pronounced the name of Captain Seymour to-night, during my contest with my undutiful daughter, that you dropped the watch-chain with which you had been playing so indolently, and clasped your hands together?—why you should change colour, and murmur to yourself the words—“ Everard Seymour ?” Pray, Lucy, can you also claim acquaintance with this gentleman ?”

Lucy rose from her seat, confronted her husband with a gaze as steady as his own, and replied,—

“ Yes, Mr. Ashley, I did once know him well. He sought my hand in marriage ; I rejected him for you. What then ?”

“ For me, or for my money ?” replied Ashley, in a tone of most bitter irony.

“ *I* have not intimated such a thing, sir,” replied the wife. But now I would ask a question in *my* turn, Ashley. How was it that you married me, a Catholic as I am, yet refuse to allow Esther to unite herself to Captain Seymour for the same cause ?”

“ Captain Seymour is a *practical* Catholic, madam ; you are Catholic only in name,” he added, with a cutting sarcasm. “ Now you know the difference. Esther would lose her faith in Seymour’s superstitious creed, you have scarcely any to lose. Again : the husband is lord over his wife, and him she is bound to obey : there would be everything to fear in the position Seymour would hold over my daughter ; there was nothing to be feared in that which you hold towards me. Are you satisfied, madam, with the explanation I have given you ?”

"There is little to satisfy me, sir, in the picture you have been pleased to draw of the relative position of husband and wife. Now, pray favor me by telling me *why* you married me? Let us have no secrets from each other."

"I believe I was foolish enough to like you for the sake of your pretty face, Lucy," said the Deacon; "unless you become more discreet I shall repent me of my choice; I sadly fear there has not been much attachment on your part."

Lucy could have raised a whirlwind in the heart of her husband by the utterance of one single word, had she answered truly. The one magic word—"Money"—would have confirmed his worst suspicions.

She, fortunately for herself, remembered the truth of the old adage, that, "discretion is the better part of valour;" and, advancing to her husband, she put on one of her most fascinating looks, raised her soft blue eyes imploringly to his, and said:

"Reuben, do you think I cared not for you when I refused Seymour for your sake?—for, remember, the world calls him just and good, gifted alike with attractive qualities both of mind and person, one whom woman might be proud to call her lord. He has transferred to Esther his unrequited affection for me.—Is he to love both wife and daughter in vain, Reuben?"

"Silence, Lucy; speak not of him, now that you are my wife. Let me hear his name no more," replied the Deacon.

Lucy had mollified her husband, she had gained her point. But a sharp pang was at her heart. She had wedded him for his gold; whilst the little affection the wretched woman ever had to give was not in her power to bestow.

Anything, anything, now, to hear his name no more,—to

rid herself of Esther, whose presence was doubly distasteful to her ; so, still with the canker worm gnawing at her heart, she wore on her face that cheerful look, and said,—

“ It is your fixed intention, then, to dismiss Esther from the Oaklands, unless she marries Walford. I think it will be best for us all. She will never attach herself to me or my children, and the Misses Murdoch will board her very comfortably at Minerva Hall.”

“ Exactly so, Lucy,” replied Ashley, it will be best for all parties to pursue this plan ;” and, as he spoke thus, he left the room, his wife remaining a prey to her own sad reflections.

Who was to blame ?—Anybody, everybody, but her own misguided self. She sat long, with her hands folded together, amid the luxury she had given up so much to obtain. She thought of Seymour,—of the attachment he had thrown away on her,—of all his noble qualities ; she looked at the gewgaws around her ; she tore from her wrists her costly bracelets, from her fingers her precious gems, and dashed them from her in bitter vexation of spirit ; tears of mortified pride coursed down her cheeks ; and, as she cast her baubles away, she murmured forth,—“ Was it for such as thee that I disdained the affection of a poor but honest heart ?—that I wedded with one so adverse to my faith, that I have a tyrant for my lord,—a master in the husband whom I must needs obey ?’ But, listen, Lucy ; calm thy mad passion ; Reuben’s foot-fall even now strikes upon thy ear ; pick up the gems for which thou hast so dearly paid, and remove the tear-drops from thy cheek, for he to whom thou hast pledged thy virgin faith approaches.

And Reuben enters, and Lucy is again lazily reclining on her sumptuous chair, the gems shine once more on her delicate wrists and taper fingers, and she looks so lovely, that the

Deacon marvels how he can ever be angry with this child-like wife.

Ah! couldst thou look into her heart of hearts, Reuben, thou wouldest see that thy chance of happiness in thy luxurious home at the Oaklands, was, after all, but very small.

CHAPTER XVI.

Early on the following morning Lucy entered her mother's cottage, with a cheek fevered from anger and agitation; and throwing herself on a seat beside her, regardless of the presence of Mildred Vernon, she exclaimed—after coldly returning her mother's kiss, and heedless of the question as to the cause of her early visit,—

“What on earth could have made you so imprudent, mama, as to allow Esther to become acquainted with Captain Seymour? Pray, when and where was it this precious intimacy sprung up? I can assure you, there is warm work at the Oaklands, which will end in her immediate return to Minerva Hall, which, if I had been consulted, she would never have left.”

It was impossible for poor Mrs. Clifton to answer both questions at once, so she remarked,—passing by the personal rudeness of Lucy, to which she had been too long accustomed,—

“We happened, Lucy, to engage apartments in the very house in which the parents of Captain Seymour resided,” and she then briefly narrated those circumstances with which the reader is acquainted, to the now astonished Lucy.

“And pray, why was I kept in ignorance of all this? Had

I had the slightest idea of what was going on, I do assure you, that, ill as I was, it would not have hindered me from sending Esther to Clapham immediately on her return home."

"Exactly so," replied the poor mother, "I guessed as much, and felt confident as to the motives by which you would be actuated; therefore it was that I kept silence myself, and enjoined the same to Esther."

"Who will not answer her ends, I assure you, mama," replied Mrs. Ashley. "In spite of the hypocritical part she has played, I will exert every means in my power to prevent this marriage with Seymour, and I am quite sure of being backed by her father, who is so greatly enraged against her, that a scene took place between them of which Esther will bear the marks for some time, and ——."

As she thus spoke Mildred arose, and would have left the room, but Mrs. Clifton begged her to remain, saying, "I regard you as I do my own child, Mildred. Lucy can say nothing which I would wish you not to hear."

Mildred, however, was not at all certain that Lucy was so satisfied that she should be present at her interview with her mother, and, therefore, declined, saying, that "she wished to pay a visit, and would embrace the opportunity of Lucy's presence at the cottage."

"I am glad that tiresome old maid has had sense enough to leave us to ourselves," said Lucy, as Mildred closed the door; "she had no right to remain as long as she has done."

"For shame, Lucy," rejoined her mother; "it would be well for you if you possessed half the virtues of Mildred Vernon. If I ever hear you speak so again, I shall conclude, that having made a rash and imprudent marriage, you are one of those unhappy wives who, envying the peace and quiet which their single sisters enjoy, have themselves had much to do in

raising a cry against them as 'old maids,' to be pitied or despised as their fancy may suit, either to affect to compassionate, or openly to vilify, and ——."

"For heaven's sake, mama, have done with this sermonizing," said Lucy; "and rest assured, that, however unhappy I may be as a wife, I consider it better than old-maidenism. But no more of this. Esther shall not marry Captain Seymour,—understand that once for all; and I came here principally to see if you had had any hand in this preposterous affair."

"I shall not much longer consent to be catechised by you, Lucy, in this most impertinent manner," rejoined the justly indignant mother; and as to Esther, I honestly assure you, I shall do my best to forward her union with Captain Seymour. Esther is an amiable girl whom I shall be delighted to see the wife of an excellent man, such as I know Seymour to be; and at the same time rescued from the miserable home she has at present, or a forced union with Ephraim Walford. But do not alarm yourself unnecessarily, for mind, only on one condition will I forward their marriage, and that is, that there be no disunion as to religious opinions between them."

"Oh, I understand perfectly well. Esther, you think, will become a Catholic; so does her father; and this, thank heaven, is the one reason why, I know, she'll never have his consent. And, one question more, mama, before I say good bye. Pray, do you know when we may expect this honor of *seeing* Captain Seymour? He will meet with a warm reception should he come to the Oaklands."

"You do not wish to see him, Lucy," said her mother, fixing her earnest gaze on the countenance of her daughter; I will spare you that confusion; I have invited the Captain

here. I know the secret of your heart, *why* you rejected him, and also, *why* you are the unhappy wife of a man with whom you have not one idea in common ; but I see no reason why Esther is to be doomed to the same life-long unhappiness for your grievous mistake. Nay, weep not so bitterly, Lucy," she added, softened by the sight of the tears which now coursed each other down Lucy's cheeks ; many blessings are yet your's, and you must now make the best of those that lie in your way. Add not to the sorrow you may feel hereafter, my child, by visiting the punishment of your own error on Esther's head."

"Enough of this, mama," haughtily exclaimed Lucy, drying her tears as she spoke. "Your perpetual homilies on the virtues of Esther would alone tempt me to dislike her, setting quite aside her desire to become the bride of Everard, whom, in my own mad ambition I rejected."

As Lucy thus spoke, she hastened from the room, and the poor mother stood sorrowfully gazing after her, as her form slowly receded from her sight ; then putting on her cloak and bonnet, she decided on seeking the society of her friends—the Harcourts, with whom she hoped to find Mildred.

Heavily on the widow's affectionate heart pressed the evident unhappiness of her daughter ; and with all the indulgence that a fond mother's feelings could urge in her behalf, she could not hide from herself the fact, that there was much radically wrong in Lucy's character ; the one great mistake of her life was now beyond remedy. And Mrs. Clifton felt assured that she had recognised, when too late, the truth of the stern old adage, that, *all is not gold that glitters.*

CHAPTER XVII.

On Lucy's arrival home from her unwonted early visit, she found, to her surprise, that Esther—who had pleaded indisposition as an excuse for not rising at her usual hour—was so seriously ill as to continue still in her room. In too agitated a mood to dare to see her herself, Lucy merely sent her maid, the result of whose visit was, that when the family doctor came he was requested to go to Miss Ashley, whom he was informed was suffering pain in the head, in consequence of an unlucky fall she had had on the previous evening.

After a while Mr. Selwyn returned, saying that, great quiet and care would be necessary, for that not only was the pain arising from the accident Esther had met with very great, but that she was also suffering under an access of nervous fever.

“Sorry news this,” murmured Lucy to herself, as the doctor took his leave; “no, there will be no getting Esther out of the way now.” And then assuming a composure she was far from feeling, she sought her husband, informed him of the result of the doctor’s visit, and repaired to the bedside of the poor girl, whose flushed face and bandaged forehead alone was sufficient to tell a tale of suffering.

But all human art can do cannot “minister to a mind diseased,” and so it was that several days passed on during which the invalid seemed rather to get worse than to pro-

gress towards recovery ; and Mr. Selwyn at length asked if there were not some cause for anxiety pressing on the mind of his patient which tended rather to retard than to further her convalescence.

“ Esther herself makes a cause for anxiety, my good friend, in having set her mind on a marriage to which I shall never give my consent,” said her father.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, expressed his sorrow at the news he had heard, and took his departure.

But friend Ashley had disguised the truth, or, only told half of it, which was equivalent to telling a falsehood altogether, for he made no mention of Ephraim Walford. But Ashley had too many servants to be able to keep family secrets, and that which the whole village were now busy with, Mr. Selwyn was likely to hear ere long.

Matters were still going on in the same way, Mrs. Clifton, Rosa Harcourt, and Mildred, constantly her companions. The wound had healed, leaving a scar near Esther’s temple as an evidence of her father’s cruelty, and yet she continued too unwell to leave her bed for more than a few hours at a time. Mrs. Clifton had whispered in her ear pleasant news, in the tidings that Seymour would visit Torquay in about two months from the present time, and then make a last effort to win the consent of her father, nothing daunted by the excessively rude letter which Ashley had sent him when first he knew of his attachment for his daughter.

Each morning Ashley presented himself to Esther, read a chapter from the Bible, asked, as a father might be supposed to do, concerning the health of his child, but never touched on the subject so dear to the hearts of both. But Esther knew that Ephraim’s journey was delayed. Waiting maids are not renowned for their discretion, quite the re-

verse; and so it happened that Mabel, the Abigail of Mrs. Ashley, informed Esther that she had overheard her mistress say, that Mr. Walford had purposely delayed his journey to India in order to see if Esther recovered, and would consent to become his wife, ere he left England.

It were small wonder, then, that Esther lingered on, her life seeming to hang long in the scale, for hope and fear alike preponderated. It need scarcely be added, that Lucy did not return the assiduous cares Esther had lavished on her during her sickness, and during many long hours she would have been left entirely alone but for Mrs. Clifton and Rosa, who, with Mildred, rarely let a day elapse without visiting her. That the visits of the two former ladies especially were not fruitless on a mind so docile as Esther's may be readily imagined. She had—despite the influence of her mother, whose principles were those of the Church of England, and who had been extremely liberal—sucked in prejudice from her cradle, especially since she had been placed under the care of the Misses Murdoch. Thus she had entertained as violent an antipathy towards the members of the ancient faith, as one so gentle could feel; much more so, indeed, than she would have done had she grown up under the teaching of the minister, Hopley, who had a fund of good sense, and not a bad heart, for his failings were rather those of the judgment than otherwise.

However, it may fairly be premised, that the Church of Rome makes many more converts than she might otherwise do, in consequence of the vituperation so constantly and freely lavished on her and her members. Curiosity is excited to see and to know somewhat more of the hideous monstrosity yclept Romanism, which grows up amongst us, rearing its head more formidably the more it is depressed,

and at the same time counting its members amidst the nations of every inhabitable clime ; and so, through the very mistaken zeal of its opponents, myriads in the United Kingdom enter her pale from the very force of conviction, who, but for this hue-and-cry, would never have thought at all, perhaps, about the matter.

Indeed, with all his faults, John Bull is not so bad a fellow after all ; if you can but make him see he is in the wrong, he will acknowledge his error at once. And so it happens, that this testy old gentleman oftentimes looks the best part of his life on the Church of Rome as idolatrous, her clergy as panderers to the foulest excesses, her ceremonies as meaningless mummeries. But if, perchance, it happens that he makes acquaintance with members of the church, in whose lives of practical virtue and good will to all he is led to recognise the influence of religion, then he immediately asks himself, how so corrupt a system can possibly bring forth aught savoring of virtue ? how, in fact, so evil a tree can bring forth good fruit ? A conversation, a sermon, a visit to some oft-ridiculed Mass-house, as it is called, then, not unfrequently, turns over the theory of a whole life, and our good friend, John Bull, who, but for the eternal ding-dong so remorselessly knelled in his ears from infancy, and but for which he would have died in the arms of his mother-church, or, of dissent, suddenly recognises truth where he had conceived the deepest errors to exist, light, where he had imagined darkness the most profound, and a code of virtue the most sublime and exalted where he had believed that vice reigned supreme. Truly, so it is, that many join the church, who, but for the exaggerated prejudice in which they have been brought up, would never have given it a thought.

Thus, then, it was with Esther Ashley. Naturally of a reflective turn of mind, she had sought in the characters of the Harcourts, Everard Seymour, and Mrs. Clifton, for evidences betokening the servile superstitious thraldom in which the Misses Murdoch and others had told her the disciples of the Church of Rome were bound; and sometimes, in the artless *naïvete* of her manner, would ask things which would excite the good lady's mirth, such as, "Did she not pray to images? or, pay for absolution? or, believe an indulgence was leave to sin anew?" &c., &c. Then she noted the virtue of the Harcourts, the self-abnegation of Seymour; and she asked herself, if the faith which could call into play such acts of self-denial and patient heroism—(for there *are* patient martyrs in daily life as well as those who suffer at the stake, and of the mental martyrdom of the Harcourts Esther had often heard)—could be such a mass of revolting superstition? Thus, then, it happened that, the doubt of such darksome error once dispelled, the mind of Esther, free from prejudice, remained not very long ere the decision was made to declare herself one in principle with him to whom her heart was given.

Mildred could not grieve over the defalcation of her young friend, as dissent held her family within its ranks, so that the Established Church lost not one of its members; but she numbered among those who bore the name of Catholics her dearest friends, and with the impulsive generosity of an honest heart, she grieved for the mistaken bigotry of those around her; and, more than all, regretted that bigotry and falsehood will raise aloud its voice in scandal and vituperative abuse of that which it simply does not understand.

But return we from our too long digression. Mrs. Clifton

and Rosa had left Esther's room, very happy at her announcement that, as soon as she recovered she should declare herself one in principle with her dearest friends. Lucy, half uncomfortable at the announcement, taking great care to inform Esther that she wished particularly she would state when the time came for the disclosure of her secret, that *she* had never swayed her mind in any way; and, feeling an inward conviction that her own case not inaptly resembled that of the servant who hid his talent in the napkin, and, going away, buried it in the ground; whilst Esther would, no doubt, double that which her Lord had bestowed upon her.

Most unhappy, indeed, was Lucy; a beautiful little girl bearing her own name was at her knee; she had promise of again being a mother; affluence and wealth was her's; her husband was indulgence itself, yielding to her every whim if she but submitted to his will. But here was the difficulty. That tyrant will, as she conceived it, forbids most rigorously the perusal of light works of fiction, the theatre, the ball-room; when in London, she dared not mix in the gaieties of her friends; when in the country, the principal recreation was what she termed the hum-drum parties got up by the minister, his daughters, and their friends; if she read one of Scott's or Bulwer's works, it was by stealth; books, indeed, there were, ponderous heavy tomes, which Lucy would not have touched; whilst scattered about in elegant bindings lay the Bible, the Pilgrim's Progress, Josephus, Milton, and Evangelical Magazines without number.

On the Sabbath the piano was forbidden, unless Lucy would play some of the psalm tunes, or sing the hymns used at the Tabernacle; and as Reuben Ashley attended the

meeting three times on that holy day, and never suffered his household to walk out, or invited his friends, the day was, of course, a sadly long and weary one to his wife.

Now, all this Lucy was aware of ere she became Mrs. Ashley—all these things she had been told of over and over again, and cautioned as to the after unhappiness such restrictions would cause to one so differently brought up; but she would not listen, and now she shrank with horror from the contemplation of a long life thus spent, for she well knew complaint was useless. Reuben was a kind and indulgent husband, only as long as Lucy never interfered with his arrangements.

Reuben, too, noticed with a secret satisfaction that Lucy's first outbreak of devotion had gradually worn away after her return from Florence; that, save the obligation of attending divine service on each Sunday morning, she very rarely visited the old chapel in the Abbey Park; that she frequented the sacraments but seldom compared with the custom of the generality of those in her church; and he rightly argued that the apple of discord between them as far as regarded their offspring, would be but small to what he had at one time supposed, should the former state of things have continued. Nor was he at all sorry to see that he had inspired her with a salutary fear of interfering or meddling with his arrangements; and on one occasion his success formed the subject of his jests with the minister, to whom he represented Lucy as a pattern wife, docile and submissive, though he had found her somewhat restive whilst in training.

"You see, my friend," said Ashley, "I allow Lucy considerable latitude; she is somewhat extravagant, but I keep her purse well filled; she has the sole control of household matters; her friends and relations come and go as they list,

but here the matter ends. I arrange what books shall be read, what recreations allowed, and have taught her that she must yield to me in all these things. She has never forgotten her visit to the Elms, nor its result; and I can boast that, by a little management, I have tutored my pretty little Papist wife, as to have a more peaceful house than some of our brethren at the Tabernacle possess, albeit, their mates are of their own way of thinking."

"And your little ones, *who will grow up like olive trees around thy table*, Ashley, what of them?" said Hopley, who never liked to yield, and allow that his apprehensions and doubts had been falsified respecting the future happiness of Reuben in the wedded state.

"Oh, for that matter," replied Ashley, "Lucy is not an over good Papist, one so lax will not have much sway over her children, whom you will one day see in the Tabernacle, my friend. I had warm work with her about our little Lucy, whom she begged might bear her own name; and as she was so sick and ill, and it *was* her own name, I yielded my consent. She has an antipathy, she says, to the holy Scripture names of Ebenezer, Joshua, Ruth, and the like; but that, with many other antipathies, she will have good sense enough to conquer, now that she is Mrs. Ashley, and understands my character better than she used to do."

Thus, in his chats with his bosom friend, the minister, did Ashley not unfrequently congratulate himself on the victory he had achieved, in forcing Lucy to own his pre-eminence in all matters matrimonial; whilst the honest old minister would sip his wine and listen, and sometimes urge him to relax the reins of authority out of very love, as they were yielded to so submissively. But the Deacon ever as-

~~s~~erted he was in the right, for, he added, "I am quite ~~s~~ure that if I once were to yield, Lucy would soon forget who ~~w~~as the master."

But Lucy had ~~a~~n aching void in her heart of hearts, which the Deacon little recked of. She thoroughly feared him since the memorable night at the Elms, so never ventured to dispute his will in the point of paying visits; and by those who were not intimately acquainted with them, they were spoken of as a model pair, who were patterns of conjugal felicity.

But ever, ever came to the young wife thoughts of Esther, her hated step-daughter's happy future with Everard, whom her own heart told her she would eventually marry, filled her mind. Would she not see her the wife of him whose fond attachment she had recklessly flung aside as not worth the having; and when she had well nigh forgotten him, heaven had decreed that she should hear of, perhaps be fated again to see him as the accepted suitor of her dreaded husband's child. Oh! cursed love of wealth; how dearly, Lucy, hast thou purchased all thy glittering gauds.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On the day on which Lucy had lectured her mother in the manner we have described, respecting the marriage of Esther with Seymour, Mrs. Clifton, as soon as she had taken her departure, turned her steps, as we have already said, to the residence of her friends, the Harcourts, when she found, as she anticipated, that Mildred was already there. The unusually pale face of the blithe, good-humoured little widow at-

tracted the notice of the sisters, who were eager in their enquiries as to the cause.

“ Why, surely, Mildred has told you, Amelia,” said she, addressing the elder sister, “ of the fresh feud at the Oaklands, in which our poor Esther is implicated. You cannot expect, love, to see me look cheerful, for the plain truth is, I have come to you in order that your kind faces may help to chase away my grief.”

“ My dear Mrs. Clifton,” interposed Mildred, “ I have said nothing of what I heard this morning, but have left you to speak of family affairs or not, as you best pleased.”

“ Just like you, Mildred, ever careful lest you should transgress ; however, there are no secrets between myself and tried friends like those now present,” said Mrs. Clifton, who then narrated all that Lucy had mentioned concerning Esther and her father.

“ Poor Lucy, I pity her from my heart,” said Amelia ; but, which, think you, Mrs. Clifton, will prove the best wife to Captain Seymour ?”

“ Without a doubt, Esther,” rejoined the widow. But, who have we here ?” she added, as two persons emerged from beneath a thicket of trees beyond a miniature lawn which, sloping gently downwards, revealed the clear blue waters of the ocean, now mirrored in the soft sunlight of a bright October day, and on the surface of which skimmed many a white sail ; whilst ever and anon the sea-gull caught the sight for a moment, and then dipping its wings in the waters, again disappeared.

But a rosy smile lighted up the faces of the sisters as these two persons entered, one of whom was their infirm and blind mother, leaning on the arm of a young man, clad in the garb of an ecclesiastic, and in whom Mrs. Clifton immediately re-

cognised Hubert, the brother, whom, mainly owing to Amelia's early efforts, had been enabled to become a priest.

The snows of seventy-five winters had fallen over the mother's aged head, and she had long been blind and helpless ; but yet the evening of her life, after all, waned gently to its close. The sharp day of adversity had for ever passed ; the comforts, nay, some few of the little elegancies of life had the exertions of the sisters won for themselves ; and then the old lady's heart so exulted, that Hubert had been ordained, that she had nothing left to wish for.

There was much to talk over of days long gone by,—days in which Mrs. Clifton, slender as were her means, had befriended the Harcourts ; and with the honest pride not unfrequently felt by those whose own genius and industry have at length earned for them a competency, the still fair artistes freely spoke of those long sad days when there seemed no silver lining to the cloud that hung around their fortunes ; and the priest brother, who had never met Mildred before, exclaimed, in the outpouring of brotherly affection,—

“ I wonder, Miss Vernon, where you will again meet a sister like my Amelia. Do you know I can call to mind one cold winter night when an urchin of some fourteen years old or more, I crept to our scanty fireside for warmth, laid my head in poor Amelia's lap, and never answered the questions she put to me, because my heart was so full I dared not trust myself to speak, and at last to her earnest entreaty I poured forth the cause of my sorrow. I had that day seen two of my school companions sent to college, and my heart was very heavy that I could not join them ; but Amelia's voice was raised to cheer me, and when I laughed at her assurance that she should earn enough to send me to college, instead of grow-

ing displeased, she arose, went to a closet, and produced some five or six small paintings, the subjects of which were taken from sacred history, and ——.”

“I pray you, Hubert, be still,” said Amelia, blushing as she spoke; “this breach of confidence is not fair; is it, Mil-dred?”

“Quite so,” said the latter; “I beg you, Mr. Harcourt, to tell me all, and not to hide your sister’s light under a bushel.”

“Well, then, Amelia told me that she could not help me with one farthing out of her ordinary earnings, but, that she had resolved to give three hours of her nightly rest to the ex-ection of productions to be sold for my exclusive benefit. The six she then produced were the fruit of the patient industry and abridged rest of the last six months. Now, look you, Hubert, she said, I sell these next week, and shall deposit the proceeds in the hands of the superior of —— college, whither I shall send you certainly in one month from the present time. Amelia fulfilled her promise nobly,” continued the priest; “many were the hours which should have been allotted to re-pose in which she worked for me, and it is due to her exertions and her love alone that I, Miss Vernon, was enabled to become an ecclesiastical student, and am now a priest.”

Mrs. Clifton knew that this was only one episode out of many which the life of Amelia Harcourt could furnish, and, involuntarily, her thoughts reverted to the scene of the morn-ing, to Lucy’s opinion of those whom she derisively styled—for the term is ever applied in spiteful derision—“old maids.” “And, without the single portion of the community, what should we, married people do,” thought she, “had we not some dear sister, or beloved aunt, or niece, whose mission it has been to lead a single life?”

And of a truth, Mrs. Clifton was perfectly correct. We

honestly believe that there lives not a woman who might not have married had she pleased. Whether she decline because the opportunities afforded her meet not her fancy, is quite another thing ; but there are some who have so great a horror of dependence on self, that they will marry for a home ; there are others, too, who will not *wed* with poverty, for they judge, and rightly, too, that if poverty be their portion, there is a neatness and quiet in the poverty of their single state which married poverty can never know.

How worse than silly ?—how very wrong, too, those foolish words ?—half in jest, half earnest, spoken by thoughtless men and women, who never made a sacrifice of self. How little do they know the heart's inner secret of those who lead that life of celibacy in the world, which, amongst Catholics, would often *fain* be led in the cloister, but for the fulfilment of some claim involving, perchance, a still higher sacrifice ?—or, how often may there not have been some dear tie rudely snapped assunder in early life ? thus making wreck of the heart's affections, so that it would be deemed sacrilege by them to think of union with another. And, thirdly,—are there none, we would ask these unwise satirists, whose very mission it is to lead a single life, who covet its quiet, its independence, its liberty of action ?—who may feel that their *vocation* is *not* to become wives and mothers ? Truly, it is, indeed, a senseless hue-and-cry uttered now by the thoughtless, and taken up and repeated again and again in malice and derision by the unhappy wedded ones of our own sex.

Of some such cast as these were the thoughts of Mrs. Clifton, as ever and anon, during that happy reunion, her mind wandered back to the scene of the morning. She was in the midst of an affectionate and united family, the sisters of which led a single life from some one or other of the causes

we have mentioned. Her friend, Mildred, too, had in early youth experienced that most cruel trial which woman's heart can know—duped, deceived, led on till within one fortnight of the day appointed for her bridal, then, it was made known to her that he to whom she was engaged had pledged his faith on the continent to the daughter of a wealthy citizen, whose fortune was immense when measured by the few thousands enjoyed by the poorer Mildred, who sprung, nevertheless, from a more ancient stock. Not till some years had passed away did she recover from the effects of such a blow ; what wonder that henceforth she would trust no more. And, with the specimens daily dragged before one's eyes of persons in married life—either through their own mercenary motives, or rash imprudence, or mistaken affection—passing their days in a state of miserable contention, may we not truly say, it would be well if there were fewer marriages, if greater care be not taken to ensure happy ones.

“ Marriage hath many pains,—celibacy *no* pleasures,” says Dr. Johnson, in his “ Rasselas.” Well, then, if the latter hath no pleasures, it secures, at least, immunity from the pain of the former state. But, wise old Doctor, in your wholesale finding fault with celibacy, you stated wrongly that its votaries have *no* pleasure, for they, at least, enjoy the inestimable pleasure of *possessing their souls in peace*, if their celibacy be a voluntary one.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was drawing near eleven o'clock at night, the previous hour, being that appointed by Mr. Ashley for his household to retire to rest, and himself and Lucy had remained up somewhat later than was their wont ; he, engaged with a book, and Lucy, busy at her embroidery frame. Not a sound had for some time disturbed the silence that reigned around ; without, all was still as eleven o'clock at night is wont to be some hundreds of miles away from the crowded metropolis,—within, it had long been unbroken, and Reuben was meditating a departure to his chamber, for, raising his head from his book, he observed that Lucy was nodding over her work, when a light step on the staircase attracted his attention. He listened, somewhat alarmed, when his fear was increased by hearing the handle of the library door turned, and the door then gently opened.

Arousing Lucy, and communicating to her fears that some person had entered the house, he opened the drawing-room door ; but, what was his astonishment to behold his daughter, Esther, clad in her night-dress, walking slowly up and down the library. His first impulse was to utter an exclamation expressive of vexation at the alarm she had given him, but the words died on his lips, as he gazed on the eyes fixed on vacancy, and perceived that she slept the sleep of somnambulism. She bore a light in one hand, and now approached the library shelves, and removing several volumes,

took them down, appeared to read the titles, and then replaced them, as if dissatisfied and unable to meet with the object of her search.

"It is all in vain," she murmured, "I cannot find here a single book treating of anything but papa's own peculiar views;" then replacing the books each in their own proper place, she paced up and down the apartment, murmuring snatches of the fine old Latin hymn, the "*Pange Lingua Gloriosi.*"

Reuben stood in wondering amazement, with the frightened Lucy, petrified at the fear of her husband's wrath, standing by his side, when, to the horror of the latter, Esther drew forth what he plainly saw was a Rosary of small pearls, to which a gold cross appeared to be affixed, the latter she reverently pressed to her lips; and Reuben, unable to witness this proof of his daughter's fancied idolatry, was already about to rush forwards and tear the hated symbol of Popery from her hand, when that of his wife clutched his wrist with a nervous grasp, whilst she whispered,—

"Reuben, beware; I have heard that it may be fatal to arouse a somnambulist, and such Esther appears to be. Do you not see she walks in her sleep, and is not accountable for what she does."

Ashley at once desisted, crushing down by a mighty effort the anger, which was swelling in his heart, when, lo! the rich, clear voice of Esther rose, in words again in the Latin tongue, and in sweet tones she warbled forth the stanza, "*Eia Mater fons amoris,* in the divine *Stabat Mater.* White as the night-dress in which she was so thinly clad,—her long golden hair streaming like a veil over her neck and shoulders, her dark blue eyes raised to heaven, and her hands clasped over her bosom,—the beautiful girl stood, as if entranced, warbling

still that fine old hymn ; her voice now dying away in a low, sweet cadence, then, again rising in the rich, melodious strains of Rossini's beautiful music, to which he has set that superb prayer.

Thus, nearly half an hour had passed away ; her father a mute, but enraged witness of the scene ; Lucy somewhat terrified, when Esther, as if overcome by weariness, sank into a chair, and, clasping her hands together, seemed lost in meditation. Then the name, "Everard Seymour," trembled on her lips, coupled with that of Ephraim ; and with the latter, a low mocking laugh, as she said, as if holding a conversation with *him* who was really present,—

"I beg and implore you to desist, and urge this point no farther ; in all else I will obey you, but I will *not* marry Ephraim. Talk not to me of the honor of being a minister's wife ; then I forego that honor willingly. I do not wish to be the bride of a minister, so let me rest in peace."

Then rising, she continued,—

"My very soul is weary of the load you put upon me. I ask not for a share in your wealth ; I have lost that which I had in your affections, long since ; and now a great barrier has sprung up between us. I cannot choose, but obey the dictates of my conscience ; another reason, methinks, why I should not be persecuted on Ephraim's account, who, surely, would not wed a Catholic bride."

As Esther uttered these words, she glided from the room, warbling again in a low voice the first verse of the "Stabat Mater Dolorosa," and her enraged father watched the fair somnambulist with a species of pious horror as she ascended the stairs, until gaining her own apartment she was lost to sight.

Returned with his wife to the drawing-room, Reuben exclaimed,—

“ Well, madam, you will please render me an account of the share *you* may have had in the pretty scene I have witnessed to-night? Inform me, madam, at what time Esther dared become a member of your church without her father's knowledge?”

“ I beg you, Reuben, to believe me,” said Lucy, “ when I tell you, that I have had no hand whatever in the conversion of Esther. I know nothing beyond that she read much when in London, and had frequent conversations with Captain Seymour. You will, also, please to remember, that you left her during many months to the unrestricted intercourse and influence of my mother, to whom she is much attached; add to this, that an engagement subsists betwixt herself and Captain Seymour. And have the goodness,” continued Lucy, rising, and lighting her chamber lamp, “ to be just to me. Own, now, what your own heart must tell you is the case: that the persons I have named are those whom Esther would consult, and who would have her conversion more at heart than I might have. Do you believe me, Reuben?”

“ I credit your assertion, Lucy, because you are so bad a Catholic yourself,” said Reuben; “ but, shame be to your mother for the scandalous way in which she has betrayed her trust. I shall question Esther myself in the morning, and if, as I fear my suspicions are correct, ill or well, I shall send her at once to Clapham, where a few months' detention under the roof of the Misses Murdoch may be of use, for my young lady will, indeed, be no fitting bride for Ephraim. Mercy on me,” added the Deacon, “ the Lord deals very harshly with me, to allow a child of mine to be drawn into the meshes of Popery.

I'll cut her off with a shilling. No daughter of mine shall presume to call herself a Catholic."

Lucy's hand was already on the door of the apartment, which she was about to quit, when her husband uttered these words ; her mind, notwithstanding her heartless frivolity, was not yet dead to the influences of Catholic teaching. She remembered that she, too, had a daughter, and this child was also one of Reuben's equally with the unhappy Esther. Lax, unfaithful Catholic as she was, she was not, nor ever would be, inclined to see a child of her's brought up in the ranks of Dissent ; nor tacitly to lead Ashley to believe that she should look quietly on, whilst he played out the game which she now plainly saw he meditated ; and, turning sharply round, she exclaimed,—

"There is another daughter in the house, Reuben, *my* child and your's, equally with Esther. Remember what I say, that child was baptized a Catholic, as such she will be reared, agreeably to your promise,—is it not so ?"

"I have just informed you of my intentions, Lucy," said the Deacon, "so no squabbling or disputes on this point."

Lucy was exasperated, she advanced to her husband, and, gazing steadfastly in his face, exclaimed,—

"That child and all *my* children shall be reared as Catholics. How dared you deceive me ?"

"We will see presently *how* the children who may be born to us shall be reared, Lucy," rejoined the Deacon, in that provokingly calm voice which never failed to irritate his wife. "Once for all remember, that, had I seen in you an earnest Catholic, devoted to your faith, assiduous to its practices, I had never married you ; for, in such a case, a woman's weakness is stronger than a man's strength. No, I married you because I saw you lax, careless, indevout,—no credit, no or-

nament to your Popish faith. Now, silence," he added, placing his hand on her lips as she was about to speak. " Why, there was nothing to fear in marrying *you*; for, do you not see, that with one like myself for your husband, and a half-and-half sort of Catholic in you, their mother, it would, really, require a miracle to be worked, for your children to grow up good Catholics. This is where I most severely blame myself, because I have suffered Esther to live with a woman as earnest as your mother."

Crushed, humbled to the very dust, at the thought of the way in which her husband had regarded her character, fearing him too much, again to speak, Lucy repaired to her apartment, but retired not to rest till she had spent half an hour in a bitter outburst of grief, in a passionate prayer that she might soon be at rest,—in earnest entreaties with offended heaven, that her errors might not be visited on her innocent children. But her own heart told her the truth that she had altogether forgotten, or, at best, striven to hide from herself, and this was, that, as the offspring of her ill-assorted union sprung up around her, the elements of discord would inevitably increase; that the first act of the drama was not yet played out. Then, to add to the bitterness of her heart, came the reflection which increased so greatly her punishment; for, the image of the excellent Everard rose before her,—he, on whom it was now a heinous sin to think,—the estimable Everard, whom she had rejected, about to become the husband of Esther, with whom there would be no apple of discord—no contentious differences, for Reuben's daughter was one with himself in principle, and would, ere long, assuredly hold the place which she would have—now that it was too late—given worlds to fill.

CHAPTER XX.

Esther had suffered so much from the effects of her long illness as to become a late riser, therefore it was that she had but just risen when her father entered her room the next morning. Always delicately fair, her complexion had become almost transparent, and those who really loved her, trembled as they noticed the delicate tint upon her cheek ; for they knew it was the hectic of fever, not the fresh glow of health. Attired in a morning-dress of white muslin, she was engaged with a book when her father entered, and the stern rebuke already trembled on his lips, for his hand grasped the volume as she laid it down, to welcome his coming ; when, to his astonishment, he found it to be merely a copy of the New Testament she had been perusing.

However, he was not to be mollified by this evident proof that the new faith she had adopted did not, as he had supposed, prohibit the reading of the Scriptures ; but, heedless of the consequences of the emotion he might cause to one in so delicate a state of health as Esther, he commenced the attack by fixing his eyes keenly on her face, and saying at the same time,—

“ So, Esther, you have dared to become a Papist without my knowledge,—you considered your disobedience in refusing to marry my friend, Ephraim, not sufficient ; are you aware of the penalty you incur ? No child of mine dwells with me after she has become an avowed Catholic.”

For a moment Esther regarded him in mute surprise, then, with her heart throbbing violently, she exclaimed,—

“ Father, I have consented not to wed Captain Seymour without *your* permission, whilst I refuse to marry Ephraim. As to the change in my opinions, is not that a matter between myself and heaven. But, *who* has told you this? I beg you to believe that your wife has had nothing to do with the change.”

“ Oh! certainly not, certainly not,” replied the Deacon: “ your conscience, my dear child, is a very facile one, and can easily bend itself to the adoption of the absurd superstitions received by him whom—in defiance of your father’s will—you wish to wed; and as you happened to acquaint me with this change whilst you walked in your sleep,—a habit I find you have fallen into,—I resolved on seeing you the first thing this morning, in order to tell you that I shall, by the end of the week, arrange matters for your return to the Misses Murdoch, who will, I am persuaded, do their very best to disabuse your mind of the errors it has received.”

“ You treat me like a child,” said Esther, ever threatening me with a return to that odious school; nor is it *just* to tell me that I make religion subservient to my earthly desires. If I never see Captain Seymour more, my thoughts and feelings will ever be the same. Whether here in my own home, or, if it be your pleasure to send me again to Minerva Hall, rest assured, my mind will undergo no change.”

“ Minion,” exclaimed Ashley, rising, and grasping Esther by the arm: “ tell me who it was first decoyed you to the teachings of Rome?”

“ Captain Seymour,” said Esther, calmly meeting her father’s furious gaze. “ Captain Seymour first laughed at those foolish prejudices in which I had been brought up. He it was

who showed me that the church's ceremonies were not meaningless mummeries, but means to a higher end, symbolical types, to all of which a meaning is affixed. I have found beauty to exist where I had been told there was a hideous deformity, truth where I had been taught there was error, and, ——."

"Enough, enough, foolish, misguided girl," exclaimed Ashley. "In your retirement at Clapham you will have more than time to regret your conversation of this morning—your proud defiance of my will. Remain in your obstinacy, Esther, and learn that my intent is to keep you at Minerva Hall till you are of age,—a good two years and more, by the way, from the present time; and then, if Captain Seymour be still faithful to the disobedient daughter whom he has led astray, and is knight-errant enough to marry the woman who will be cut off with a shilling, where he has, doubtless, looked for a large fortune, why, *then*, I shall be very willing for him to have you."

As her father uttered this cruel speech he quitted the room, leaving Esther a prey to her own melancholy reflections; for, she well knew him to be a man quite capable of carrying out his threat. A sickening sensation seized her; even her delicacy of health would, she foresaw, place no obstacle in his way. She had relied too confidently, it appeared, on the extent of the affection she had always imagined he possessed for herself; and had now to learn the bitter truth—that the force of prejudice, which so often raises barriers of ice between man and his fellow man, had effectually steeled the heart of her father against her. Turn whichever way she would, the prospect seemed dark and gloomy in the extreme. No earthly hope had she in the power of her friends to save her, now that the inexorable fiat of her father had gone forth. There was,

simply, nothing to be done but to pray for patience and fortitude, if, indeed, it were the will of heaven that she should meet the threatened trial.

CHAPTER XXI.

A drenching rain, accompanied by violent gusts of wind, swept across the spacious streets west of London, and had already thinned them of the many wayfarers whom necessity had compelled to leave their comfortable firesides to brave the fury of the storm. Threading the fashionable locality of Belgravia with a rapid step, our old friend Everard Seymour now approached one of its most courtly mansions, and uttered an aspiration indicative of pleasure, as his eye glanced at the richly-curtained windows, the subdued light stealing faintly through the crimson satin damask which hung over them in heavy folds.

Disencumbering himself of his cloak and hat, Everard, who seemed perfectly at home, followed the servant, who led him to the apartment, from the windows of which the pleasant light of fire and lamp had issued ; and here, reclining on a couch, with a book in her hand, was a lady of middle age, by whose friendship Captain Seymour was honored.

In early life the Lady Laura Wentworth had been the pupil of his mother. She never lost sight of the gentle friend who had resided for several years beneath her parents' roof,—answered at the font for her first and only child,—obtained him a commission in the Naval Service in later years—and when the hand of penury and sickness laid



hold of Mrs. Seymour and her husband, she, to the best of her power, alleviated their sufferings.

The really nobly-born never suffer those of the middle class to feel the disparity which fortune has placed between them, this belongs only to those of the middle class itself, who possess the poor advantage of something more of worldly goods than those around them may enjoy; and thus it was, that Lady Laura welcomed Seymour as cordially as if he had been her equal, and, gazing on his radiant, joyous countenance, said,—

“I am sure you have good news to communicate, Mr. Seymour, or I should not see you here on such an evening as this.”

“Yes, my dear madam,” replied Everard, drawing a letter from his pocket. “If your ladyship will peruse these few lines, you will see I have been far more fortunate than I expected. I have obtained, in short, the command of a frigate, and could not rest till I had imparted my good news to you, my best friend.”

“And what will you do now, Everard?” said Lady Laura. “Not tarry long in London, I am quite sure. I should not wonder now if you are off to the Vales of Devon in a great hurry, and marvel not, but that you bring back as your wife, the gentle Esther Ashley I have heard you speak of.”

“Aye, indeed, madam, nor dare I lose any time in the matter,” replied Everard, “and so your ladyship will perceive,” he added, “when I tell that I have this day heard from Mrs. Clifton, that her father’s anger is so excited against her that he has resolved on banishing her from his house.” And Everard then went on to state how strangely through the attacks of somnambulism to which she was subjected, Mr.

Ashley had become acquainted with his daughter having become a member of the Church of Rome.

"I applaud the resolution you have taken, Everard," rejoined the lady; "and if you find all you have heard correct, let the young lady have no fear; bring her to me; she shall have a home here until she becomes your wife."

Many grateful acknowledgments did Captain Seymour return for the kind patronage Lady Laura thus generously accorded to Esther, who was as yet only known to her through repute; and his heart lightened by the knowledge that she could find protection under the roof of Lady Wentworth as her companion, should her deference to her father, as she was under age, make her scrupulous of marrying without his consent, though he might, if all that he had heard be correct, expel her from his house. The gallant Captain left her ladyship with his mind unusually light, and departed for Devonshire early the following morning.

On arriving thither he immediately repaired to Mrs. Clifton's, and found to his horror that the next day was that appointed by the inexorable Mr. Ashley for his daughter's return to Minerva Hall.

For this Captain Seymour had not been prepared. He had fancied that in the first burst of his indignation he might probably have expelled Esther at once from his house, and have driven her to seek the protection of Mrs. Clifton; but foresaw greater difficulties in snatching Esther from the imprisonment, for it was little better, with which her father threatened her.

"Shall I take the citadel by storm, Mrs. Clifton?" the Captain at length asked, after some few moments of anxious meditation; "the wind seems terribly against us, but the vessel may yet be got into port. I will to the Oaklands to-morrow morning, and brave the Deacon's indignation at once."

"I applaud your courage, Captain Seymour," replied the widow, "though terribly fearful as to the result. This, too, is a peculiarly unhappy time, for Ephraim Walford weds one of the spinsters of the Tabernacle, and Ashley will not easily forgive Esther for depriving him of having him for his son-in-law."

Accordingly, true to his resolution of the previous evening, Everard prepared a little before noon on the following morning for his purposed visit to the Oaklands. It was a bright, sunshiny morning, although it was December, and pointing to the gay sunlight, he bade Mrs. Clifton be of good heart, for that if he did not mistake that sunbeam augured well for the success of his mission, and, setting spurs to his horse, he blithely wished her adieu, and rode off at a brisk canter on his way to the Oaklands.

On sending in his card he was immediately shewn into the library, in which Mr. Ashley was seated alone with Esther, whose face was lighted up with a smile of glad recognition when he entered, but whose mute pressure of the hand expressed more than she dared utter in words, for her father sternly bade her to withdraw.

"I am much surprised that you should think of intruding your presence here, Captain Seymour," said Mr. Ashley; "pray, may I ask its purport?"

Before, however, Everard could reply to this unceremonious address, the door opened, and Lucy entered the room. For one instant she stood in silent amazement, holding it in her hand, her unusually pale face betraying the emotion that she felt on thus suddenly meeting face to face with one whom she would have given worlds to shun. But her husband saw and enjoyed her confusion. He felt that there was within that

mass of inconsistencies—her woman's heart—an unspeakable aversion to encountering Everard as the suitor of Esther, though she had herself rejected him ; and, in those soft tones he could so well assume, he bade her enter, saying,—

“ My wife, Captain Seymour. I need not introduce you to each other, as I understand you were intimate friends before I married Mrs. Ashley.”

The slight titter which accompanied these words was intended to convey to Everard a knowledge of Lucy's rejection of his addresses ; he felt the insult, keenly aware that he stood before the man for whom Lucy had refused him, and that he was about, perhaps, to incur again the same mortification a third time, whilst renewing his petition for the hand of Esther.

With a blanched cheek and trembling lips, making a strong effort to conceal the emotion she so keenly felt, Lucy slightly touched the offered hand of Everard, and then withdrew to a seat in the deep recess of a bay window, the better to conceal the agitation she made so great an effort to repress.

“ I am happy to see Mrs. Ashley again,” said Seymour, in answer to the remark made by the Deacon. We were old friends in years gone by. And in reference to your question, as to the cause of my visit here, Mr. Ashley, I beg you to reconsider the request I have already presumed to make for the honor of the hand of your amiable daughter. My character, Mr. Ashley, is of high repute—my means such as will enable me to support Miss Ashley in a manner every way befitting her position, for I have just been raised to the rank of a post-captain ; and, with my hand, sir, I offer to your daughter—(and Everard rose as he spoke, and his deep voice trembled with emotion)—a heart full of the most devoted attachment.”

Hot tears coursed each other down the cheeks of the ambi-

tious Lucy, at the thought of the luxurious as well as happy home which, in her over eager thirst after wealth and station, she had so recklessly flung aside ; and her heart beat violently as her husband, rising, said, slowly and emphatically,—

“ Captain Seymour, were you an admiral, my determination in refusing you Esther’s hand would not be one iota altered. I have other views for Esther, for whom I had selected one of my own faith. She is obstinate and undutiful. Now, hear my resolve, Captain Seymour. I send Esther till she is of age to those who may, perhaps, be able to eradicate from her mind those tendencies to Rome which you, sir, and my wife’s mother have unhappily instilled. No child calling herself a Catholic, after she has received the pure Gospel truth, shall dwell beneath my roof ; nor, will I harbour near me one who, not yet twenty years of age, dares rebel against my authority, and select a husband for herself. You have your answer, Captain Seymour,” added the Deacon, who, yet further to increase the insult, was advancing to ring the bell, when a servant ushered in the minister, Mr. Hopley.

“ I wish you good morning, Mr. Ashley,” said Everard, taking up his hat, “ and am sorry to find your moral perceptions so obtuse as to lead you to contemplate deliberately causing the unhappiness of your child ; but, rest assured, though your fiat as a parent has gone forth in the inexorable decree you have pronounced, and though we must both bend to that decree, that the day will come when it will be reversed, for, on Esther’s truth and faith I will answer with my life.”

As Everard spoke thus he turned to leave the room, but the old minister, who had silently and attentively regarded him whilst he was addressing Ashley, advanced, and laying a hand on his arm, said, in his own blunt peculiar way,—

"If I mistake not, sir, you are the gentleman whose proposals for Miss Ashley's hand have been rejected by her father."

"No interference, I beg you, friend Hopley. Surely you would not countenance my daughter's rebellion to my will, or, her union with a Papist?"

"Not so fast, not so fast, Deacon," rejoined the minister. "Don't you know that we must always make the best of the evils that lay in our way. You have yourself helped Esther to become a Papist by placing her within reach of Popish influences. And with due respect to Captain Seymour and Mrs. Ashley, who I see is present, by leading her to believe that you did not consider Popery so very dreadful and superstitious, or you would not have married a Catholic yourself. May I continue, Deacon," he added, archly regarding Ashley, and throwing himself into a seat. "Do you not see that you have yourself been inconsistent, and may thus have led Esther into error? Now Esther is a Catholic; you cannot undo that mischief. Ephraim Walford is about to take unto himself another for a mate; and were it otherwise, could not wed your daughter, now she has gone over to Rome. Now, consider everything well before you let Captain Seymour depart. You know it is an abominably stupid thing," he added, tapping his snuff-box as he spoke, "this freak of sending a young woman like your daughter to pine away her health and strength at a boarding-school. Depend on it, she will come away more obstinate than she'll go in."

"And pray, Mr. Hopley, as you take it into your head to interfere so much about my affairs," said the Deacon, "may I ask to what this long speech of yours tends? It looks, I must confess, vastly, as if you wanted me to allow Esther to become Captain Seymour's wife."

"Exactly so, my dear friend," said the minister. "Esther

has unhappily lapsed into the delusions of Popery, let her then have this Popish husband, and at the same time rid your house of one whom, I can soon see will be a sad eye-sore before long."

Very slowly and deliberately did the Deacon rise, walked across the room, and ring the bell.

"Tell Miss Ashley to come here immediately," he said to the servant who answered the summons."

The Captain strove to appear perfectly calm and self-possessed, but his effort, man as he was, was useless. He observed a good-humoured twinkle in the eye of the shrewd sensible old minister; he felt that the latter *knew* he possessed great influence over the mind of the Deacon. "How will this trying scene end?" thought he; but, at that moment a light step approached, the door of the apartment was opened, and Esther—her eyes yet suffused with tears, the expression of hope and fear alternating by turns in her sweet countenance—entered the room.

With folded arms the Deacon stood, and gazed sadly on his child, then on Everard, and the minister. Suddenly he exclaimed,—

"Captain Seymour, my daughter, Esther, has by her rejection of my friend, Ephraim, and her adoption of the errors of Popery, raised up a barrier between us which, mayhap, may never be removed. I cut her off with a shilling, reserving her fortune for the more dutiful children whom Providence may send me. What say you? Will her hand be worth acceptance, as that of a dowerless bride, for as such only do I give her to you?"

"Esther, my love, I ask only for your own sweet self," exclaimed the Captain, passing his arm around the waist of his betrothed. "Deacon Ashley, with all my heart I thank you,

you have conferred on me the most inestimable treasure. Yet, look up, my own Esther ; weep not in these precious moments' he added ; but the retreating step of the Deacon sounded on Esther's ears. Everard knew what she must feel, and allowed her to free herself from his grasp ; she hurried to her father, and, laying her hand on his arm, exclaimed,—

“ Oh ! my father, but one word ;—and your blessing on my union.”

“ My permission you have, Esther, and this you owe in great measure to the pious minister, whose teaching you have scorned. Become Mrs. Seymour when you wish, my daughter, but you will not be married from the Oaklands. Now, not a word more,” he added, seeing that Esther was again about to speak. “ Later, when the wound caused by your perversion and rebellion to my wishes is somewhat healed, I shall be happy to hear from you ; till then, farewell. I expect to be obeyed now but in one point, it is, that you reside at Mrs. Clifton's till after your marriage. I shall return home in two hours, and expect you ere then to have left this place.”

Poor Esther, with eyes streaming with tears, returned to Everard, seeking, like some wounded dove, shelter in him who was to be all in all to her ; but the first burst of passionate emotion over, she advanced to the good old minister, placed both her hands in his, and exclaimed,—

“ Accept my most grateful thanks, dear Mr. Hopley, for your kind intervention in my behalf ; a kindness which I feel the more deeply, because so unlooked for.”

“ And mine, too, Mr. Hopley,” added the Captain. “ May I hope that we shall meet as friends at some future time ; for I am sure you recognise the truth by your noble behaviour this morning,—that coercion in matters of conscience does no good, but may be productive of much harm ; also, that unless

to affection be united oneness in principle there may be sad shipwreck, perchance, of domestic happiness."

"Exactly so, my good friend, and I hope to make your acquaintance later," rejoined the minister; "and now, by your leave, I would bid Esther dry her tears, remembering that there is no joy here without its taint of sorrow, and that sooner or later all will be forgotten by her father. And as there is no time to be lost, to make good use of that at her command; and so I will go and have a walk in the grounds whilst she prepares for her departure, and do you, Captain Seymour, hasten to Mrs. Clifton, and prepare her for the reception of her visitor; I will not be long before I bring Esther to you."

Everard saw and admired the delicacy of the minister's proposal, and, bidding his betrothed bride adieu, hurried away to communicate the welcome and unlooked-for news to Mrs. Clifton. The minister rambled into the grounds, supremely happy himself in the consciousness of having performed a good action, and made two deserving fellow creatures happy; and Esther, now weeping at her father's unkindness, then her face radiant with smiles at the thought of the happy future which opened before her, hastened to pack up the few valuable trinkets she possessed, with the various articles belonging to her wardrobe.

But, there was another, reader, to whom we have not yet alluded,—another who had been a neglected, heart-broken witness of the scene which had but now taken place, another, who, concealed from sight beneath the curtained embrasure of one of the library windows, had been a forgotten, but not a heedless spectator of the hopes and fears of the last hour,—an hour, yes, less than an hour, but, to her bruised, crushed heart, an age in its duration.

"Am I so forgotten—am I so neglected?" she said in bitterness of spirit, as the footsteps of Esther and her companions died away. Oh! yes. And what intensity of anguish had been her's?—how had she hung on each word her husband had let fall?—how vainly had she pressed her hand on her heart to still those tumultuous throbings?—how did she alternate between hope and fear?—fear, where, rightly speaking, she should have no fear.

And now, when she judged she should not be seen, like some guilty thing, she hurries to her room; hot, scalding drops of disappointed ambition, envy, and jealousy, combined, mar the beauty of the lovely face which has proved her ruin; and reaching the privacy of her own apartment, Lucy locks the door, and vents in an agony of tears her bitter grief. The wail of a beautiful babe in a cradle by her side strikes upon her ear; misguided woman that she is, she turns from it with a feeling of disgust, for, if it is her child, it is Reuben's, too,—that Reuben whom she married for his wealth, crushing her heart's affection for another, and whom she now has learned to hate.

"And Esther is really to be his wife!" she exclaims, binding her hands across her burning brow. But, stop: to think is sin, Lucy, doubly a sin, for Reuben *is thy husband*, and Everard you rejected in the hour of your fancied triumph—in your mad greed for wealth. You have yourself rivetted your golden fetters; then wear them bravely now. The past is beyond recall. Gird thyself up for the fight. Let not the watchful eye of him who loves thee still, whatever be his faults, detect in thy countenance the slightest sign of the grief that preys at thy heart. And so it is that, disregarding that weeping child, she ever and anon bathes her fevered temples, whilst again and again she pauses, and

a cry of intense agony escapes her. But, hark!—there is a knock at the door, and the gentle voice of Esther demands admission. To see *her* is worse than death. But, hark!—she speaks again. She has dropped the “Mrs. Ashley,” wordsher fatherhad forbidden her to use, and, to the youthful Lucy, has skilled her lips to the utterance of the sacred name of “mother.”

“Ma’mma, let me come in ;—dear mother, do see me before I go ;” pleaded the gentle Esther.

Lucy dare not refuse longer : she opens the door, flings her arms around Esther’s waist, and bewails bitterly this estrangement and separation. And Esther,—simple, simple Esther,—she mingles her tears with her’s,—she wonders how Lucy can now weep so bitterly her loss, when she was so cold and calm a witness of her own former grief ; but no dark thought, no suspicion of the fearful truth crosses her sinless mind, and she believes Lucy is sincere, and again and again presses her in a fond embrace, caressing, too, the innocent child.

And the farewell is said, and the miserable Lucy watches Esther from the window. She sees her join the old minister, pass her arm within his, and they wend their steps in the direction of her mother’s cottage. She pictures to herself the happiness of the little group that will soon assemble there, and another wild burst of passionate grief is about to find a vent, when her gaze falls on the time-piece ; one half hour more and she must meet her husband ; that half hour is spent, then, in quiet sadness, in bathing her temples, arranging her disordered hair, and doing her best to recover composure.

At length she hears his step in the hall beneath ; her eyes tell a tale she cannot hide—she has been weeping violently.

"They shall be tears for Esther's loss," she says softly to herself, while a bitter smile sat on her lip, and grief lay heavy at her heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Christmas festivities had not yet passed away, when Esther was so harshly expelled from her father's house, and as the Captain had decided on spending a short time on the Continent, previously to taking command of his frigate, he wisely determined to lose no time, but espouse Esther immediately.

The latter, we need not say, was received most joyfully by Mrs. Clifton and Mildred; and a few days later she penned a long letter to her father, entreating him, in the name of Everard as well as her own, to be present at their approaching nuptials, and receive her again into his favor. To this letter no answer was returned. Even Lucy's visits to her mother were suspended; and the party at the cottage learned, from other sources, that a grand party had been given by the Deacon, in honor of the marriage of his friend Ephraim, and that, in a speech made by the Deacon, he had alluded to the misfortune by which he had been visited in Esther's rebellion to his wishes.

"What can't be cured must be endured, Esther," said Mrs. Clifton, as with a sorrowful face and tearful eyes she one day declared that she supposed she must give up looking for a letter from papa, who evidently would not write now; "so put on a cheerful face, for Everard will be back



~~to-day, and let us have your trousseau in readiness, for the end of the week draws near."~~

We had omitted to state that Captain Seymour had ~~repaired~~ to London the day after he had received the Deacon's permission to marry Esther, in search of some little ~~etceteras~~ for his bride, and also with the intention of bringing back his aged father with him, who was to give Esther ~~a~~ way.

At last the eventful morning arrived ; and, arrayed in the ~~simplest~~ manner possible—her dress of plain white silk, trimmed with orange blossoms, and a white veil over her head, her golden hair falling in ringlets over her shoulders—as Esther is a virgin bride—and her bridesmaids, Rosa Harcourt and Mildred, also tastefully, but simply dressed, the bridal party filled the three carriages which were to convey them to the Torre Abbey.

Not a little excitement did the news of Esther's wedding naturally create. The whole story, in which not a little romance was interwoven, had long been on the lips of the Torqnay gossips ; and the marriage of the daughter of a man of such influence as the Deacon, her conversion to Catholicism, her previous rejection of the young minister, and her final expulsion, disinherited as she was, from her father's house, furnished a rich theme for the gossips of the neighbourhood ; and few there were, either gentle or simple, who did not wander to the Abbey Park on that morning.

A motley crowd assembled in the old chapel ; and as this was in very truth a Catholic wedding, the bride and bridegroom both communicated at the Mass which was offered up for them after the ceremony was concluded—for Esther

had been well instructed, though so secretly, and wanted but little more after her departure from the Oaklands.

There were three persons, however, at the ceremony, whose presence Esther little dreamed of; for in a dark recess stood her father and his friend the minister; and in one of the tribunes quite alone, her presence unknown to her husband, kneels Lucy, veiled and muffled. She had arrived very early, so as to escape observation, and through the folds of her thick veil she gazes down, herself unseen, on the wedding party beneath. She thinks of her own bridal morn, with all its pomp and pageantry; she watches so eagerly that happy pair draw nigh to receive the Holy Communion, of which she did *not* partake; she had listened so trembly when those indissoluble words were pronounced, which made those two one, till death itself should break the bond; and she had pressed her hand convulsively upon her heart to stop its throbbing, when the soft voice of Esther broke upon her ear—when the deep tones of *one* who *once* would have vowed to love and cherish *her*, if she would have it so, clearly and distinctly fell upon her ear.

And wealth, too, was Esther's, without her seeking,—for *she* would have married Seymour, poor as he was, when he proposed to me, says Lucy to herself, as her mind recurred to old scenes and old times. But now all is nearly over, save the exhortation of the white-robed priest, before whom kneel the wedded pair, who, one in faith, humbly can treasure up the words he utters, and will place them to good account.

And now the bridal party disappear, the vapoury wreaths of incense gradually fade away, the lights are extinguished, and all have left the chapel save Lucy. She lingers. Oh! why, but that, happily, that little spark of faith still alive

be not quite extinguished. She kneels, and prays in bitterness of spirit ; a load of iron is on her soul ; a sin, she knows full well, has long lurked there, of the existence of which for some time she had not even dreamed ; but now she is aware of its presence ; and wistfully, longingly, does she gaze at the door of the confessional. Oh ! what would she not give to have the courage to declare that sin ; and yet, even that morning she has yielded to temptation ; for her soul yearned once again to see him who, since she pledged her faith to Reuben Ashley, never could be aught to her. And, oh ! strange perversity of the human heart, him, whom she never loved so much till she knew that she had made a fell mistake in fancying she loved wealth far better—him on whom her thoughts had ceased to rest, till she regarded Esther as his bride —then the ever-busy tempter set to work on her unguarded soul. She thought on what her life might have been, on what it *was*. She had nerved herself up boldly to play the hypocrite the few last weeks ; to smile, when she would fain have wept ; to look happy and contented in Reuben's presence, when it was all irksomeness and misery ; and on this wedding day had stolen forth, sin-laden, to the Abbey Chapel, again yielding to the tempter's voice.

The lamp of the sanctuary still sent up its bright, red flame before the tabernacle, where the Holy of Holies reposed, shrouded under the lowly veils in which the Catholic loves to contemplate his Lord ; and there, oh ! unwonted sight, does Lucy linger still, praying earnestly and long, might she but have strength then to conquer the shame she feels at the disclosure of that sin which rests upon her soul —for in thought, at least, she has broken the faith she has pledged to Reuben. And, hark ! a footfall sounds upon her

ear ; and now the venerable priest, who was Lucy's spiritual guide and friend, emerges from the sacristy, and kneels in the sanctuary to pray. He would not attend, then, the wedding breakfast, only the friend of Everard, who had just performed the marriage ceremony.

Many months had passed since Lucy had ventured to approach the sacraments. She fain would seek the confessional ; and the wretched woman half rose from her knees, resolved to deposit sin and its burthen at the feet of that venerable priest. She rises, steps softly forth, and opens the door of the tribune, when the Evil One whispers false shame to her soul, and she again draws back.

Oh ! no, no. Could she dare breathe into *his* ear ? could she tell *him* who had so counselled and so warned her against her luckless marriage ?—of the monster sin she bore in her soul ? Should she not sink for shame under the self-abasement of such a confession ; for one after another, in all their naked deformity, rush before her mind's eye her many shortcomings—her greed of wealth ; to satisfy this greed, her acceptance of Reuben Ashley's hand ; the cruelty with which she had treated Esther ; the mean, plotting spirit by which she had been actuated ; and then the dark sin which stained her soul. No, she cannot bear to confess her soul's burthen to this old friend. “Another day,” she says to herself, “I will order the carriage to drive me to some distant town, and I will seek some strange priest, and in his ear I can better deposit this sin. He would be so shocked to think that *I* should sin so deeply ; and I should feel such shame with one to whom I am known so well.”

Oh ! false shame, false reasoning, inspired by the tempter. But so it was the timely inspiration was unheeded ; and Lucy

Shept forth from the tribune with a stealthy step, for she
embled to face him. Having thus resolved, knowing
that, with the privilege of an old friend and a Catholic
priest, some admonitory word would not be wanted as to the
cause of her lengthened absence from the Abbey Chapel;
she very cautiously and gently stole down the stairs,
and out through a side door, never disturbing the priest,
who still lingered in the sanctuary, and bearing away with
her her burthen of sin and woe.

And long before Lucy had dragged her trembling limbs
to her luxurious home, her husband and the old minister
had returned by a different route to that which she had
taken; and when they were out of hearing of the gay
loiterers who had assembled to witness Esther's wedding,
the Deacon exclaimed, sighing deeply,—

“A pretty scene, indeed, have I witnessed this morning,
for the way in which my wretched daughter has been mar-
ried shews me that she will be a most fervent Papist.”

“No doubt at all about it,” replied Mr. Hopley; “and
take my word for it, that marriage will prove a happy one.
I like not losing Esther, Mr. Ashley, for she was one of the
best lambs of my flock; but you know it has all come—her
secession from amongst us, and her marriage with Seymour
—to those Popish influences amidst which she was so rashly
cast. You were inconsistent, my good friend, no doubt at
all about it; but there are elements for happiness in the
union I have witnessed, and so far, well and good; how-
ever, act with more circumspection as the little ones at home
grow up. By the way,” he added, “who was the white
haired old gentleman who gave away our pretty Esther?”

“I suppose it was Seymour’s father,” almost groaned the
Deacon. “There now, Hopley, I wish you had not asked

that question, for I felt irritated beyond measure when I beheld that old man so coolly taking my place."

"Well, that *is* excellent, considering you would not take the place which of right belonged to you," replied Mr. Hopley. "I think that was too trifling an affair to ruffle your temper; however, good bye for the present," he added, as he arrived at his own house. "Mind, I prophesy that this marriage, Papistical as it is, will prove a happy one; and do you take care how Mrs. Ashley brings up your other children."

"You were quite right, Mr. Hopley," replied the Deacon, "but, you really will drive me mad if you so perpetually remind me of the consequences that have occurred from not following your advice. I really think you don't much care that Esther has so enraged me."

"Oh, yes, I care very much," replied the minister, "that one who has listened to me, and whom I have taught and cared for, has gone over to Rome; but, forgive me, friend Ashley—for I use but the liberty which you should freely grant your minister. So say farewell in a friendly way, and be more wary for the future."

The Deacon, who could not be angry long with Hopley, accepted with warmth the offered hand, agreeing to meet him in the evening, with Lucy, at the home of the newly-married Ephraim Walford; and with a sad heart Reuben turned his steps to the Oaklands.

Little did either Lucy or her husband imagine that the other had been present at the wedding ceremony; but, while Reuben frankly owned, on his return, where he had spent the morning, Lucy concealed from him that she herself had been present, and was as well acquainted as himself with all the minor details which he poured into her unwilling ear.

Ashley was sorry to see her look so ill; but this—oh! refinement of deceit—arose from sorrow for the estrangement that had taken place between themselves and Esther. So tortuous are the ways of error, that one sin treads rapidly on the heels of another. “She wanted a little excitement,” he said. “The Walfords were going to have a large party that evening, to celebrate the recent marriage of Ephraim, and also, as a sort of farewell parting, as he would shortly embark for India. He had accepted an invitation for her and himself—it would be the very thing to raise both their spirits. She was to put on her best looks, and he expected they should pass a very pleasant evening.”

Lucy expressed her willingness to accompany her husband,—(in the first days of her marriage she would have refused); and when Ashley had left the room, she murmured—“A pleasant evening!—Does he seriously think that such society as that which he enters can ever afford me pleasure?—and on the evening of *such* a day to be forced, whether I will or no, to look happy and contented.”

But let us say a few words of those who were the chief actors in the—to them—vitally important ceremony of the morning. A happy party were those who had assembled at the wedding breakfast; and some few hours later, the bride and bridegroom set off *en route* for Paris, leaving the white-headed old gentleman, who had unconsciously excited the ire of Mr. Ashley, domiciled with Mrs. Clifton, till the return of Esther and her husband should determine their future abode.

Very sorrowfully, however, did Esther feel as she gazed on the white walls of the Oaklands peeping through the leafless branches of the trees. She was affectionate, and loved the

Deacon much more devotedly than he ever gave her credit for doing; nay, even her tears fell as she sadly looked from the carriage window, till the Captain laughingly asked her if she would have liked to remain there till she had been finally sent back to the loving custody of the Misses Murdoch.

A merry laugh was the reply; and so many unpleasant reminiscences of the past had that name conjured up, that Esther bore away with her to *la belle France* no more sad thoughts, wherewith to damp the happiness which the excellent Everard so richly deserved to enjoy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lucy was too apt to look with a jaundiced eye on the few amusements which her husband's Puritanical views permitted her to enjoy, as also, on the certainly not unamiable, if somewhat prosy society in which he permitted her to mix. Most true it is that there is a dark and a fair side to everything, and it was no less true that had Lucy, having committed the great and grievous error of marrying Ashley only for his wealth, possessed only enough common sense and virtue to conciliate one who really loved her in his own fashion; there were still sufficient elements of happiness within her reach. True, she had done worse, even, than this, as it appeared to her later most fatally true, that her heart even had not been in her own keeping; yet, it is possible, that had she not met Everard again, encountering in him whom she had rejected, the future husband of Esther, that her thoughts would never have strayed in that direction. Unhappily, however, far from being conciliating or amiable, she was quite the reverse.

There were, as elsewhere, kind and gentle souls amongst the wives and daughters of Ashley's friends; and many of them—in the early days of her wedded life—had courted her acquaintance; but she had grievously offended several by her *brusque*, curt manner,—by her almost undisguised satire,—her ridicule of their prosy, sleepy existence, as she termed it; so that she had made to herself enemies of those who had been prepared to become her fast friends.

Amongst these was the old minister, who, not at all intolerant in his views, would have regarded Lucy with respect, had he seen aught that was earnest in her character;—indeed, it will be remembered that there was nothing inconsistent in the tone he had adopted about her marriage with Ashley, for, had not the result shewn that it would have been better for both parties had they never met. Indeed, it is certain that, placed in the position she held, as the wife of a man of no small influence in the town, Lucy had it in her power to do no small amount of good—of good done by example, had she the wisdom or the virtue to manifest it in her conduct; and she might have, as a practical Catholic, much influenced those amongst whom her lot in life was now cast.

The marriage of Esther, with all that had previously occurred, had occasioned so much excitement, that it is to be doubted, if, amongst the numerous guests who assembled at Mr. Walford's that night, there were any more welcome or more courted than Ashley and his wife,—not, even, excepting Ephraim and the young lady who had been overjoyed at accepting the place Esther had so gladly relinquished, in the young minister's affections.

But Lucy's thoughts were far, far away from that to her prosy party. She had no sympathy in common with them around her; in *missionary labors*, *working parties*, *ten meet-*

ings, and so forth, she took no part. And when, after the ladies had adjourned to the drawing-room for a time, and she had with much weariness of spirit satisfied their enquiries respecting Esther, they lapsed off into their own—to Lucy—uninteresting chit-chat, she sat with vacant gaze and abstracted air, thinking of the events of the morning.

“I am sorry to see you so unwell,” said a gentle voice beside her, and Jane Hopley, the minister’s eldest daughter, who numbered, perhaps, some forty years, but whose soft brown hair had not one silvery thread, and whose countenance bespoke a mind at ease and content with itself, now seated herself by Lucy, and added—“I doubt not but you keenly feel the altercation between Mr. Ashley and his daughter;—but, do you know my father now thinks it all for the best that Miss Ashley has married Captain Seymour; for, as he truly says, what good would it have done for Mr. Ashley to oppose the match. Esther would have been persecuted to no purpose, and would have her own way after all at a later period: for, is it not your opinion, dear Mrs. Ashley, that she did all that could be reasonably required of her, in promising not to wed without her father’s permission, but that she had a full right to refuse Ephraim. And don’t you think it quite a happy thing that he has allowed her to marry Seymour?—Were you not very sorry you were not at the wedding, to share in the happiness of Esther, whom I cannot help loving in spite of the sad errors into which she has fallen? But, bless me,” added Jane, “you are surely ill, Mrs. Ashley. Then, as she beheld the little remaining color her excessive emotion had left on Lucy’s cheeks gradually fade away to an unearthly hue, and her head sink back on the couch on which she was seated, she called aloud to her sisters, Martha and

Elizabeth, to assist her, for that Mrs. Ashley had fallen into a swoon.

The unhappy Lucy remained long in a state of insensibility, and when she recovered, by the joint efforts of her husband, and the Misses Hopley, who had caused her to be removed into another apartment, she burst into a fit of hysterical weeping, the result of which was, that the Deacon somewhat impatiently ordered the carriage for his return home.

"Our good friend, Ashley, is visited by many sore trials," said the senior Mr. Walford, after the Deacon's departure. "This doll of a wife, with her pretty baby face, seems a perpetual source of disquiet; and then the perversion of Miss Ashley, and her marriage to-day with this Roman Catholic Captain, must quite have unsettled him. Truly, it is written, 'The Lord loveth him whom he chastiseth;' and chastised our friend, brother Ashley, certainly is, indeed," he added with a sigh. "I little thought not to see the pretty Esther my son's wife."

"If she had been, you would have lost *your* chance, Rhoda," whispered a young girl to the simpering bride. Just fancy, now, how very awkward it would have been for my brother, Ephraim, if Esther *had* married him, and gone over to the Papists after becoming a minister's wife."

In more refined society the fact of Esther's rejection of Ephraim would not have been introduced before the newly married lady; as it was, she knew perfectly well that she was an object of envy to all the spinsters at the Tabernacle, and looked up in the face of her lord and master with quite an air of pride and self-gratulation, at the honor which he had conferred upon her, by making her his wife.

In another corner of the room sat some of the elder ladies,

and by them Lucy and her conduct were spoken of in no gentle terms.

"It is not love for Esther that makes her so sad," exclaimed Elizabeth Hopley ; "every one knows that she always disliked to have her near her. I noted that she changed color when Jane was speaking of this Roman Catholic whom she has married to-day. The fact is, he was an old friend of her own, and I have heard on good authority that she rejected him. However, whatever the Deacon suffers, I for one am not sorry for him ; there is not one of us who go to the Tabernacle who would not have make him a better wife than she has done ; he is served quite right."

"Hush, Elizabeth," said the more placable Jane ; "if you speak so excitedly people will say you were yourself disappointed ; have more self-respect than to allow them to insinuate such a thing. People will be sure to say you are spiteful because he did not marry you instead."

And those who had said so would have made no mistake, either, and Jane was well aware of the fact ; she being a sensible woman, and withal, far too proud and too full of self-respect to think of those who never cast a thought on her, as she knew it was often the fashion of her sex to do, and her own sisters amongst the number. She had counted o'er her forty years, if unloved by those out of the pale of her own family —on her own side, unloving—and as she at least was no schemer,—her utter indifference to the fact concerning which her father, by the way, was not so careless, as to whether she lived married or single.—was the cause of Jane Hopley's fair and comely countenance being the index of a contented and easy mind.

And people did talk more than ever after Lucy's sudden illness at the party of Mr. Walford ; and well was it for her

future peace of mind that the Deacon—still blind to the full extent of his wife's mistake, in marrying himself for his gold, and pitying her for that failing health, which evidenced itself in her wan and dejected countenance,—suddenly resolved on spending the ensuing year in the metropolis, in one of the most fashionable localities of which he hired an elegantly-furnished house, leaving the Oaklands in the care of a trusty old servant and his wife.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

The rich sunset of a beauteous summer eve had tinged with a golden glow the park and mansion of Riversdale, a pretty village in one of the Southern Counties, stealing through the casement windows of the old red brick mansion, and shedding its roseate hue over a little party who were seated in its old library, gilding the sunny tresses of a fair girl whose arms are thrown around the neck of a woman of some thirty-seven years of age, but with whom time hath dealt gently withal ; for the countenance of Esther—for it is of her we speak—has lost nothing of the expressive sweetness which it bore of old, having but changed into a subdued and matronly loveliness, —the rich golden hair scarce yet revealing a silvery thread,—the fair cheek, mayhap, paler,—the eye less bright, but an air of quiet happiness thereon, though at this moment a touch of sadness steals over her face.

Before her stands her husband, now Admiral Seymour, his hand on the head of the fair girl, who forcibly reminds him

of Esther, as she was when first he saw her kneeling by the side of his dying mother, his lips invoking a blessing on her head, and the happiness they both feel is tempered by sorrow, for they part on the morrow with their child, who has refused a splendid alliance with a noble house, to become a novice amongst the Sisters of Charity.

Gently fall the words of the young girl on the ears of her parents, as—on this the last evening she may, perhaps, ever spend with those she loves in her old home at Riversdale—she prefers her request :

“ Ruth writes me that she is so very miserable at home, will you let her fill my place, my own dear parents ? ”

“ Ruth *Ashley* fill *your* place, my darling ! ” exclaimed Esther, her tears which she had with so much difficulty restrained, now fairly bursting forth. “ No, my Madeleine, that may never be ; the place you vacate never again can be made up to me, even if our little Mary were old enough to leave the school-room. We give you up to God, my Madeleine, for He demands the sacrifice ; but, long and painfully shall we feel your loss. What say you, Seymour ? ” she added, turning to her husband.—“ Dare we grant our darling’s last request ? ”

“ It is hard to determine,” replied the Admiral. “ I would gladly allow Ruth to come here, but fear lest the evils of her early bringing up should be productive of mischief to the young people here. What think you, Madeleine, of this young aunt of yours ? ” said the Admiral. “ Is she as untamed as her sister Lucy ? —Does she, like her, ridicule alike her father’s rigid Dissent and her mother’s Catholicism ? —Tell me frankly, love, what you think of Ruth ; for, if she be at all like Lucy, she may not find a home at Riversdale.”

“ I watched Ruth carefully, papa,” replied the girl, “ during my late visit at Rose Villa, for I wished when I left Ri-

versdale to ask you to let her come here, she is so very miserable at home. Poor Ruth is very plain, you know ; and whilst Lucy and Miriam seem to me to be the best beloved of their mother, on account of their beauty, and especially Lucy, as that same beauty has won for her a wealthy husband, poor Ruth is scarce treated like one of the family ; she seems isolated from all of them,—treated like some worthless thing not of themselves. The poor child is disregarded by her mother, tyrannized over by her sisters, plainly told that she is ugly and dull of comprehension, and uncared for by her father, because, having spent much of her time with her poor old grandmother, Mrs. Clifton, she is not so utterly without religious principle as her brothers and sisters ; but will sometimes, when at home, steal off to the Abbey Chapel. A poor neglected thing is that tall, ungainly, dark-complexioned Ruth Ashley, papa ; and, yet, I have often thought, when I have noticed the tear steal under the cold kiss of her mother, and the contemptuous indifference of her sisters, and observed the hasty endeavour to repress that emotion, that a rare gem may, perchance, be hid beneath that rude casket. Will you give Ruth a trial ?" added Madeleine, " and see if my ideas be correct."

" But think you Ashley will let his daughter come ?" enquired the Admiral. " You know, my child, how very roughly our overtures of assistance have been received in their late reverse of circumstances."

" I have no doubt but that they will be glad to get rid of her," rejoined Madeleine, " seeing that she is no favorite with any of them. However, if you will allow me, perhaps it will be less formal for me to write a few lines as from ma'ma, inviting her to spend just a few weeks here ; and as the ice has been a little broken by your having taken Samuel off my grandfather's hands, and I have recently spent a few weeks

at Rose Villa, they are not likely to refuse, and then the invitation to Ruth can be lengthened, or not, as you wish later."

"Go, then, Madeleine," replied the Admiral, "and write a note to your grandfather at once; your mother and I will take a stroll in the park, and be sure you join us as soon as your letter is written."

On a gently-sloping lawn before the mansion which the Admiral had chosen for his abode, was his younger daughter, Mary, some eleven or twelve years old, with two fine boys who now bounded forwards at his approach. One child only was absent from Riversdale, this was the eldest son, Everard, who was an ecclesiastical student at St. Omer. But, we will leave Esther for awhile, who is happy as she deserved to be, and with our reader's leave, look back a little into the events which have taken place during the long period of seventeen years, which have elapsed since Esther's wedding day.

CHAPTER XXV.

Seventeen years! what a long term it really is in the brief span of our mortal day; how long a time to look forward to, yet how short does it appear when we look back. In that space of time the aged in a family sink into the grave, youth merges into the fulness of manhood, the girl into the ripened maturity of the woman; and the hope with which they set out in life is not unfrequently blighted in its very bud, leaving in the heart the canker-worm of disappointment, or, if that hope be realised, the desire mayhap cometh not till the rich brown hair is wreathed with many a silvery thread, the brow marked with the lines caused by anxiety and care.

Of the characters whom we have introduced to our readers, many have sunk to their rest. The amiable Amelia Harcourt has long since passed away, and Rose has fled to the calm of the peaceful cloister, unable to endure that solitary home; for the one link that bound her to earth has been rudely snapped asunder by inexorable death. Mrs. Clifton, too, is no more, as also the Admiral's aged father, with many other of the inhabitants of Torquay.

The beautiful home in which our old friend Lucy spent the first years of her wedded life is no longer hers; for Mr. Ashley took it into his head, some years since, to speculate largely in mining transactions and railway companies, and doing thus, has managed to speculate away many thousands of his own handsome fortune; so that the Oaklands was sold to a rich cotton merchant, who owned many mills in the North—"and, with his usual provoking obstinacy," writes his wife to her friends, "Ashley insists on taking a small and unassuming villa at Mary-Church, thus adding to my mortification and trial, because, forsooth, he will not leave the Tabernacle."

For several long years Ashley never saw his daughter. It was better for all parties, perhaps, that it was so; but the touch of affliction wonderfully softens the heart. And on the return of Everard Seymour to his home—now promoted to the high rank of Admiral—and on hearing from Esther of the misfortunes of her father, he immediately proffered his assistance; and then Ashley, yielding to circumstances, and humbled by his distress, thanked his son-in-law for his kindly overtures, invited him to Rose Villa, and accepted his offer to take his eldest son, Samuel—a graceless urchin, some fourteen or fifteen years of age—under his care, and bring him up for the Navy.

Strangely altered is Lucy, thought both Esther and her

husband ; and she herself, who was slowly expiating, by a life-long trial, the error of one false step, felt an unusual flutter at her heart when the Admiral and Esther entered, and thanked heaven that her lot and theirs was cast in scenes so far apart.

But it is not now our purpose to dwell upon the past, save in so far as sufficient to give the reader an insight into what has occurred in the first portion of our tale. We have now to show the effects on the parties concerned, and their children, of a union in which there were widely different opinions and principles held, and to show how such uncongenial elements trench on the well-being and happiness of after life.

It is the day after Madeleine's letter has been posted to her grandfather, with whom, despite her resolution to become a nun, she is a bit of a favorite, for he was won by her gentle unselfish disposition, and the family party are seated in the small breakfast room at Rose Villa.

Let us describe them one by one. Reuben, our old friend. Reuben is not much the worse for wear, save that he has become rather corpulent, and his once dark hair is now somewhat of an iron-grey ; his countenance is much as of old—his lips, always compressed, show the same firm determination of purpose ; and if his family do not entirely love him, he can at least inspire fear ; for the young people quickly learned, as their mother had done before them, that there was a will before which all must bend.

Doing the duties of the breakfast table is a faded woman, the once beautiful Lucy ; she is but six years the senior of Esther, but might be fourteen, so great are the ravages which an ill-assorted union, mental anxiety, and care have made on what was once an unusually attractive countenance. The aquiline features are now too sharp, and the consequence of

a naturally uneven and fretful temper have exhibited themselves in the expression of her countenance. She is attired in a neat morning dress, and looks pale and haggard ; but Lucy is not content to fade when her daughters begin to bloom, at least in the eyes of the world, and ere the day be on the wane those pale cheeks will have borrowed somewhat of a false tint wherewith to lead them a touch of the natural glow lost rather by care than by the hand of time.

By her side is her eldest daughter Lucy, the counterpart of what she herself was at her daughter's age ; she is her mother's most favored child, and ere long will marry one who is reputed wealthy.

Then we have Miriam, whose golden tresses, violet eyes, and tall and queenly form have earned her the name of La belle Miriam ; and beside her, and she certainly acts as a capital foil, is seated a girl of fourteen, of ungainly form and stature, tall beyond her years, her complexion is dark, very dark ; she is, in short, an ugly brunette—no doubt about it—this, dear reader, is the ill-favoured Ruth.

But hark, the postman's loud rat-tat sounds on their ears, and the next moment the housemaid places in her master's hands the letter which our reader is aware, Madeleine Seymour has written to her grandfather.

Ashley perused its contents, and placed the letter, without a word, in the hands of his wife. She read it through, and returned it to her husband, with the curt remark—

“ It is quite out of the question, Reuben ; I shall not allow Ruth to accept that invitation. She has not her wardrobe in a fit state to spend a single day at Riversdale. Why on earth could not Esther have invited Lucy or Miriam, instead of a child like Ruth ? ”

The large black eyes of Ruth—the only redeeming feature

in her face—were raised imploringly to her mother, and with something very like a tear trembling on the long dark lashes, she said—

“ O ma’mma, pray let me go. I am sure no one there will mind seeing me in my shabby frocks.”

“ Be silent, Miss; it is not my intention you shall go. I have a thousand things for you to help me with at home,” replied the mother. “ You have the baby’s things to finish making; besides, I shall not allow your studies to be interrupted for any idle visiting, you are not old enough yet for anything of the kind. I shall write to Esther,” she added, turning to her husband, “ and request her to invite either her sister Lucy or Miriam instead. I do believe she is led entirely by that girl, Madeleine; and that, at the bottom, it is *her* wish that Ruth should be asked instead.”

“ Very likely, indeed,” said the Deacon, in his usually bland and quiet way; “ and very right, too, that my daughter, Esther, should yield to the wish of a good and dutiful child, from whom she is going to be parted for ever. Come here, Ruth,” he added, and as the girl approached him, he lovingly parted aside the thick black curls which clustered over her temples, and said,—

“ Now, don’t lose a moment; make haste and pack up what you’ll want for two or three weeks, and I’ll be ready by three o’clock, Ruth, to see you safe off in a first-class carriage; and you will then reach Riversdale by night.”

Mrs. Ashley put down her cup of chocolate with an air of quiet astonishment, and the countenances of Lucy and Miriam were expressive of anger and indignation, as their mother exclaimed,—

“ You surely do not mean, Reuben, that that child is to go

to Riversdale. I assure you, I cannot have anything to do with preparing her clothes."

"I do seriously mean that she leaves Mary-Church to-day," replied the Deacon. "You will get all ready yourself, Ruth. Go and look to your little matters at once."

The expression of Reuben's will had gone forth, there was no further appeal; but the Deacon saw by the lowering brow of his wife, and the tearful countenances of his two elder daughters, that a storm was gathering; and, remembering, as the inspired writer says, that, "the venom of asps is under the tongue of a contentious woman, he wisely determined to beat a retreat, so strolled out for his morning ramble.

"It is scandalous," burst forth Lucy, as her father closed the door, "to think of Miriam and I being shut up here, scarce ever going out, while a child like Ruth is to elbow her way in at Riversdale. Papa is shamefully indulgent, or he never would allow that ugly little thing to take precedence of us."

"Yes, indeed," chimed in the pretty Miriam; "and a fine fright she will look to go to that fine house, for she has not one decent frock to go in. It is a most shameful thing that she should be allowed to accept the invitation, which, I suppose, as ma'ma rightly says, is at the instance of that saintified Miss Madeleine."

"My darling girls," said Mrs. Ashley, the frivolity of whose disposition and mind years and sorrow had not amended, "it is not Madeleine alone who has been at the bottom of this invitation, but your half-sister Esther, whose character is quite the reverse of my own. Do not hope, Miriam, for any good favour from that quarter; seek, with Lucy, after your own settlement in life. Esther will, most likely, turn to Ruth, for the very reason that she is ill-favoured. I am very sorry,"

she continued, as she rose from her chair ; "Ruth was hard at work, making up the new short clothes for baby, and I shall miss her very much. However, it is no use saying any more about it ; for papa's will must be obeyed, girls, as both you and I very well know."

Thus spoke this sage, right-minded mother. We reserve to another chapter further insight into the characters of the youthful scions of the house of Ashley.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Had the lapse of years in any way altered the characters of Ashley and his wife ? We answer—no. The Deacon had long since had the frankness to own the error he had committed to his now aged friend, Hopley, and felt no small humiliation at seeing himself oftentimes the only occupant of that easy, well-cushioned pew in the Tabernacle. He had, poor man, long since realised the fact, that all his resolutions of bringing his young people up in his own way of thinking were likely to vanish into thin air. Lucy had at length yielded up, after many a stormy scene, his right to the boys ; but the urchins soon found out that ma'ma took Lucy and Miriam, *when* she went to Divine Service, which, by the way, was by no means every Sunday, to the Abbey Park ; and, smitten with curiosity, one day stole a march unknown to their father, and afterwards made the discovery, that their ma'ma's religion "was the prettiest—they liked it best." As the girls grew up, however, with no good example set before them in the mother, their Catholicism merely rested in the fact of an occasional attendance at church, a scoffing laugh when their grandmo-

ventured to remind them that they were Catholics only in name, and to urge them to the performance of their duties, and on the part of the elder boy, an attendance also, compulsory than otherwise, at meeting. The prosy sermons, as he termed them, and hum-drum psalm tunes, which he was wont to aver, when out of his father's hearing, invariably sent him to sleep, for which misdemeanour, by the way, he not unfrequently was severely punished. Ruth was the only exception to the rule, and this was caused by the child's constant attendance on Mrs. Clifton, whose advancing age and infirmities experienced a consolation in the little girl's presence, which Ashley had not the heart to refuse, the more especially as he had long given up the hope of seeing his children turn out good Christians in his own fashion, and also saw, that Lucy herself presented an obstacle to his having the eye-sore of beholding his children grow up zealous Papists. Moreover, Ashley recognised in Ruth the scape-goat of his family. He had himself taken an aversion to the child for her very fondness for Mrs. Clifton, which led her, ere thirteen years had passed over her young head, to rise two hours earlier in the morning, that so her lessons might be diligently conned ere she should visit the sick couch of the afflicted relative, which her elders, Lucy and Miriam, rarely sought.

There it was that Ruth so frequently met the aged pastor whom her mother so sedulously avoided, for deep at the heart of the unhappy Lucy lay that one dark sin—that one plague-spot, which had made the torment of her life. Her casual meeting with the Admiral rudely jarred upon the forced calm of her life, and conjured up painful recollections of the past; also, forcing on her mind the remembrance that, agreeably to the doctrines of her church, she

was laying up for herself an eternity of woe did she die with that dark sin unexpiated. True, Mrs. Ashley had for the long space of seventeen years been cut off, virtually, from the church to which she still outwardly belonged, clinging, as it were, like some withered tendril of a flourishing vine to the parent stem; for, rarely does the Catholic, even if for forty or fifty years a renegade from his church, utterly lose the influence of its early teaching.

Thus it was that this unhappy woman bore about with her a conscience which she deemed oppressed with guilt, yet lacked the courage to throw her burthen aside. Thus it was that little by little she had thrown aside the practices of her faith, for she dreaded to come in contact with any influence which should force her to look into the recesses of her own heart.

But Ruth had not been overlooked, and many a lesson of quiet patience did she learn at the bed-side of the long suffering Mrs. Clifton. Her father had not forgotten his expulsion of Esther from her home for a similar line of action, nor how he had disinherited her in consequence, and like chaff before the whirlwind, his gold had been cast hither and thither, leaving his coffers well nigh empty. Was he to be harsh with Ruth? Well, at first he resolved it should be so, but there was such a winning meekness in the young girl, such an abandon in her own guileless manner, that Ashley's heart opened in spite of himself, and little by little he relaxed in the wonted harshness of his treatment; and it was, in fact, her father, who, under the apparent coldness of his manner, felt any affection for this neglected girl, on whom her whole family seemed determined to wreak their spite and anger,



Mrs. Ashley had, indeed, many more crimes to repent of than that which lay heaviest at her heart, and amongst them was her scandalous treatment of Ruth, whom, in her infancy, she was wont to term "an ugly dark little thing, unlike any child of her's, and of which she could not bear the sight." Small wonder was it that the girl grew up tyrannized over by her two elder sisters, till her once buoyant spirit was fairly crushed, and tears were oftener in the eye than a smile upon the lip.

Two very second-rate servants were all Mr. Ashley could now afford to keep, there was, therefore, much to be done, for Lucy was as exacting and indolent as in the days of her husband's prosperity. It was quite out of the question for the two lovely girls, Lucy and Miriam, to interfere with domestic duties, so that the swart, ill-favored Ruth must be taught betimes; and so it was that she was kept hard at the needle, at household employments, ministering to the wants of the indolent, vain girls, whose sister she unfortunately was, or, to the caprice of her frivolous and guilty mother; and at other times kept close at work for the youngest child, a tiny thing not yet a year old, whose infantine robes had all passed through the fingers of the unhappy little Ruth.

True to his appointment, at three o'clock the Deacon returned home, ready to conduct the girl to the railway station, and not sorry to have an opportunity of punishing at one and the same time his misjudging wife, as also his elder daughters. But what on earth is more odious than a domestic squall? and the Deacon lingers in the little entrance hall ere he approaches the scene of discord, anxious to ascertain the cause of so much disquiet.

The cause of offence is Ruth, for he hears her accosted in no very gentle terms by her sisters as well as her mother, and, reflected in a mirror which hung at the entrance of the dining-room, he beheld Miriam's fair countenance now crimsoned with anger. And could it be possible that Ruth should deserve it, she who was ever so yielding and docile? But now he heard a shower of blows descend from the hand of his wife on the face and neck of the unfortunate girl. The Deacon was shocked, he had once injured Esther by the violence with which he had thrown her from him, as our readers will remember; but, man as he was, he had never so lost himself as the fastidious, delicate Lucy had evidently done;—he was shocked, because Lucy looked so like some vulgar woman of the lower class, with that upraised instrument of punishment intended only for an unruly boy;—he was shocked, too, because, he considered corporeal punishment, on the whole, rather debasing and hurtful than otherwise. And now hastening forwards he arrested the upraised arm of the angry woman, and drew to his side the weeping ill-used Ruth.

"Come hither, child," he said, "and tell me what you have done wrong, and how it is you are not ready."

"Lucy and Miriam," replied Ruth, "came to me after you had left, papa, and ——." Here the girl hesitated, and looked at her mother as if fearful to continue.

"Speak the truth, miss," said Lucy, "and do not deceive your father, as you attempted to deceive me."

"Say not a word to me, Ruth, but that which is truth," said Ashley, fixing his earnest gaze on the open countenance of his child; "you have already been severely used, it would seem, and I hope unjustly so. Now, fear not, Ruth, but tell me the whole truth."

"I do not like, papa,—indeed I do not like to tell you all ; spare me, and believe me not in fault."

A low laugh from the mother alone met the girl's ear, and, burying her face in her hands, she sobbed out—

"Will nothing that I can do win for me love or pity?—Yes, I *will* tell you, papa, all that has passed. Miriam followed me to my room to amuse herself by what she called inspecting my wardrobe, and you know, papa, my best dress is a figured muslin which was one of her's ; and, snatching it from my hand as I placed it in my trunk, she tore the skirt in three places, exclaiming, 'that, at least, if I went to Riversdale and she were left to mope here, I should have no dress of her's to go in.' I threw the dress aside, and ma'ma heard me reproaching Miriam for her unkindness, and when she required an explanation, Miriam insisted on it that it was I who tore the dress dragging it out of her hand, and accused me of falsehood ; and, oh ! papa, believe me, it is not so much for the loss of going to Riversdale that I am unhappy, or, for the disgrace and pain I have suffered, but, that I should be regarded as a liar ; this is what makes me so sad."

"Lucy," said the Deacon to his wife, "come with me to Miriam's room, and do you, Ruth, go and prepare for your journey," he added. On arriving at the chamber he mentioned, his unwilling wife bearing him company, he said,—

"Now, madam, open those drawers and show me Miriam's dresses."

With hands trembling with anger Mrs. Ashley unwillingly complied, and her husband turned over one after another as they laid before him, till his hand rested on Miriam's best, a beautiful muslin trimmed with lace.

"That will do, madam," he exclaimed ; "now call Miriam to me."

One look at the pale countenance of her mother, and the indignation which sparkled in her father's eye, told Miriam that *her* hour had come.

"Come with me," he said, "to Ruth's room ; you will give her this dress in exchange for that cast-off by you which you have destroyed. And for the future learn to speak the truth, and subdue your envious feelings to one who has already suffered too much for you."

"For you, madam, I have a word or two later," he said, addressing his wife, as he left the room.

Miriam knew it were vain to cross her father in his present mood, and, with a heart ready to burst from vexation, she accompanied him to Ruth's room.

"Ruth," said the Deacon, "Miriam has brought you her best muslin dress, in lieu of the one she has so unfeelingly destroyed. Nay, take it, child," he added, seeing that Ruth was unwilling to accept the proffered dress ; "take it without hesitation ; for I tell you, my daughter, that if she gave you twenty dresses, they could not make amends for her conduct this morning. That will do, Miriam," he said, as, with the hot tears of vexation coursing down her cheeks, the young lady placed the elegant dress in her sister's trunk. "Now you may go, and endeavour not to forget this morning ; profit by the lesson you have learned, and let it be a guide for the future." Then, bidding Ruth be quick, he went to the dining room to await her coming, and meanwhile to say a few admonitory words to his wife ; but the bird had flown, and the two girls had also disappeared.

Doubtless, the Deacon's idea was correct, in imagining that, having treated her daughter so shamefully, Lucy was anxious to avoid the confusion she would feel at parting. Poor, forgiving Ruth, however, was sorry, and felt her pleasure

marred by the adventure of the morning; however, the Deacon felt very glad to see her face again wear its somewhat subdued smile; and, charging her with a host of loving remembrances to the half sister whom she had but once seen, he turned from the carriage, and rambled on for some time, buried in thought, and when he awoke from his reverie, smiled on finding that he had really been picturing to himself that it would be an excellent thing if Esther, his own affectionate Esther, would take a warm fancy for his poor, plain Ruth, and would ask him to let her stop at Riversdale.

Arrived at home, he found his wife alone in the dining room. He looked around in search of the offensive instrument of punishment which she had so unsparingly used over Ruth's delicate shoulders. He laid hold of it, approached his wife, and said—

"Now, madam, it is at your peril you ever use such a thing as this to your daughters, who, by the way, are far beyond the age at which it is seemly to subject them to corporeal punishment. You err deeply by your scandalous injustice to my poor Ruth; and, mark me, madam," he added, "the day will come when heaven will punish you, unless you repent of your unnatural conduct."

"I cannot love Ruth like my other children, Mr. Ashley," replied the perverse Lucy. "I punished her, because I believed she told me an untruth. However, you have amply avenged yourself on poor Miriam, I must say, by depriving her of her best dress on Ruth's account. I assure you I do not feel at all sorry that Ruth has suffered this morning; it was not right she should have it all her own way."

"Woman," exclaimed the Deacon, irritated by her indifference and cruelty, "do you ever remember your own mo-

ther ever using you as you have treated your unoffending child this day?"

"Truly no, Mr. Ashley," replied Lucy, "my mother would have been horror-struck at the thought of such a thing, if she had so forgotten herself where I was concerned. I should not have tamely submitted; she would have made me more obdurate. A blow, indeed; the idea of such a thing," she muttered derisively.

"Woman—false as you are fair"—exclaimed Ashley, with *such* an example in your own mother, how dared you so forget *yourself*."

"Enough, Mr. Ashley," muttered his wife, "Ruth is naturally obstinate and perverse. I pray you, do not compare my girlhood with hers. Indulgence would have had no sway with her, Mr. Ashley; and I have to return you my best and warmest thanks," she added, with a bitter satire in the tones of her voice, "for sending that girl away at the very time when there was so much work in hand, and a young infant to look after."

"I would advise you to make Miriam and Lucy domesticated," said Ashley; "turn over to their fingers the work you have heaped on Ruth."

A bitter and derisive laugh broke from Lucy's lips, as her husband spoke thus, and she replied—

"My beautiful Lucy, who will shortly become a bride, to be condemned to work—the idea is quite amusing, Mr. Ashley; or my pretty Miriam either. You jest! Work, coarse domestic work, is not fit for girls whose beauty is, you are aware, their only portion; but solitude and obscurity and the quietude of domestic life is the fittest place, Ashley, for the ugly, ill-formed Ruth, whom nature, by some strange mistake, has made my child."

"Woman, if *I* mistake not," said Reuben, striking his clenched first violently on the table beside him, "a heavy judgment will yet attend you for your most unnatural conduct; and, mark me—but the day will come when from your injured child you will seek that aid which your more favored daughters will deny you. Yet, one word more," he added, "and remember my determination is made: it is my firm resolve to ask my daughter, Esther, if she will supply your place to Ruth, and allow Riversdale to be her future home."

"Nay, Ashley," said his wife, starting to her feet, "do not play the fool with me. You surely jest, and are trying to frighten me, because you deem me too severe with Ruth."

"I believe I am not given to idle jesting, madam," coldly replied the Deacon. "Ruth returns here no more."

As he thus spoke he left the room, and his wife, throwing herself into a seat, gave herself up to the indulgence of her own wayward grief, at the unexpected loss of the young girl whom she had hitherto regarded rather as the servant of the whole family than as a daughter.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The last golden rays of a delightful summer sunset were slowly fading away, when the carriage which the Admiral had sent to meet Ruth at the railway entered the avenue leading to Riversdale Manor House, a stately old English mansion, the casement windows of which were now lighted up with the last beams of departing day. But the carriage wheels are heard, and Ruth gazes eagerly from its windows,

wondering if amongst these stranger faces there will be any as ugly as her own; but no, they are all fair and comely in her eyes, and her young heart sinks within her as she asks herself the question—"Will any one here speak to me as Lucy and Miriam, aye, and even as ma'ma has done?" and a bitter sigh escapes her as the last name trembles on her lips.

But, beneath the spacious portico stands her half-sister, Esther, her sweet face wearing its own peculiar smile, and she is the first to press the hapless little Ruth in a warm embrace; and the latter looked steadfastly into that kind, gentle face—so like some dear mother's embrace had been her greeting—and her large, dark eyes lighted up with pleasure at the thought that Esther had not been repulsed by her ugliness. And then the Admiral was kind; and the group of young ones, with sweet Madeleine at their head, all had a kind word for poor Ruth. And, though the sun had set, still they were all wishful to amuse their stranger relative; so they rambled through the grounds, and to the conservatory, and then took her to see the domestic pets of each fair child, and lastly, to a small chamber, all draped in pink and white, which was for Ruth's use alone; and thus it was that the moon had risen, and yet the young people returned not, till Esther herself, marvelling at their absence, went herself in quest of them.

As her gentle step advanced down the long gallery, now well nigh darkened by the coming night, she heard the voice of her young visitant proceeding from the little room we have mentioned, and through the half-opened door she discovered, by the light of the moon, which streamed through the casement window, the little group, and for a

few moments stood an unseen witness of what was going on.

Over each fair head the moonlight shone, and in the midst of the youthful circle was seated the dark-haired, black-eyed Ruth, who was apparently entrancing the imaginations of her young auditors, and, with all the vivid colourings which own poetical fancy brought to bear, was narrating to them some wild and romantic legend, ever and anon interrupted by loud bursts of applause from the delighted children. Then, her tale concluded, Ruth arose, and proposed that they should adjourn to the dining room; but all save Madeleine, who pleaded weariness for Ruth, were urgent for another story. Then, to Esther's infinite surprise—for she certainly little dreamed that this young, neglected sister possessed any imaginative powers—Ruth replied—

"I will tell you in verse of two pretty legends I have somewhere read in prose, and the first I shall call

"THE OLD ABBEY; OR, THE VISION OF THE ACOLYTES."

Then rising, and standing out from the little group, the pale moonlight shining on her harsh and irregular, but not inexpressive features, the young Improvisatrice commenced as follows:—

Down by the tangled hazel copse, through thicket, nook, and dell,
Two lovely children bend their steps, where now the convent bell
Tolls forth its gentle summons on the balmy morning air,
And tells, in silvery cadence, that the hour for Mass draws near.
Swiftly the children hasten on to those dear moss-grown walls,
Where, all the live-long summer day, the golden sunlight falls—
From dawn of early morning till the night-dew gems the grass,
Amidst its aisles and fretted nave their childish hours they pass.
Within the chancel now they kneel, and o'er each fair young brow
The sun-beams, through the rich stained glass, a flood of light doth throw;

Pure as the spotless robes they wear, no shade of sin or care
Has e'er deformed each seraph face, or stamped its dark seal there.
But the Holy sacrifice is o'er, and no human form is near,
Save the Abbot and his Acolytes, who still kneel there in prayer,
Whilst sunbeams play'd o'er marble tomb, o'er nave and sculptured aisle,
And gilt with gleams of lambent flame that old time-honoured pile.
But now the Abbot's prayers are o'er—he rises, turns away,
Till sweetly pleads a childish voice—"One moment will he stay."
The Abbot, sage with gentle smile, inclines his listening ear,
Whilst eagerly the Acolytes impart the news they bear:
"Some few days back, dear Father, we were kneeling here alone—
The breeze sweep'd through the forest trees with sad and fitful moan;
'Twas noon-day, yet the shadows fall, till all seemed dark as night,
Save that from Our Lady's altar there stream'd forth a wondrous light;
And whilst we gazed and wondered, a little child drew near,
Unlike to us, dear Father—would we were half so fair!
His hair flow'd down in ringlets, like threads of shining gold,
And veiled his sweet and beauteous face in many a dazzling fold.
He approached, and sweetly smiling, gently bade us have no fear—
Oh! his voice, dear Father, floated like sweet music on the air;
And the light that shone around him made all things clear as day,
Though the last faint gleam of sunlight had long since passed away.
He has promised, too, to take us, his Father's home to see;
But, ah! from his soft thrilling words, what must that mansion be?
The precious stones that glitter here—the marble sculptured dome,
How poor, indeed, to those bright gems that grace his Father's home?"
The Abbot made no comment, but, with gentle voice he bade—
The two sweet boys bring to him, "when the morrow's Mass was said,
The fair young unknown stranger—for, I, too, fain would see—
The bright and gorgeous mansion that he has pourtrayed to thee."
The morning sun shone sweetly from the azure-tinted sky,
And through the leafy forest trees the zephyrs gently sigh;
Swelled softly through the hazel copse, or, stirred the sleeping flower,
That with its scent embalmed the air, of glen and woodland bower.
Before the grand High Altar the monks yet kneel in prayer,
For, though Mass is o'er, the Abbot, and his clerks still linger there;
But now the Brethren draw them nigh, a strange, sad fear they feel,

Those forms seem almost death-like—so, mute and still they kneel;
And o'er each Acolyte's fair brow a sunny smile yet plays,
And round the Abbot's snowy head the sunbeams shed their rays.
But, Death's icy hand hath severed the golden cord of life,
And freed those faithful, loving hearts from earthly care and strife.
No more, the legend tells us, but the monks were wont to say,—
That Our own Dear Lord, in person, had summoned them away.
But ere they saw His Father's House, death closed their loving eyes,
For, mortal gaze may never see what lays beyond the skies.

Loud was the applause of the children as Ruth concluded, and urgent their entreaty that she would yet tell them the other legend she had alluded to; but, Esther, who had lost not a word, and who continued rapt in astonishment, an unseen witness of all that had passed, noticed the look of weariness which hung over the young girl's features, and was about to enter the room, when Ruth passed her hand over her temples, paused a moment, as if to collect her scattered thoughts, and then, as if struck by a sudden inspiration, recounted, in her own simple verses, the well-known legend of—"The Spectre Priest."

THE SPECTRE PRIEST.

1.

The gorgeous sun hath sunk to rest,
Down in the glowing purple West—
Now stained with ev'ry hue,
From violet dark as sable night
To amber pale or ruby bright,
Tinged o'er with sapphire blue.

2.

Note where the crimson sunbeams fall
On yonder ivy-mantled wall—
A time old honored pile;
There ramparts line the walls along,
And buttress thick and postern strong,
Add to its massive style.

3.

O'er the calm waters of the moat
 The crystal water-lilies float,
 Like buds of silver spray;
 Whilst from the copse the timid fawn
 Steals o'er the park and sloping lawn,
 At close of waning day.

4.

Above yon range of forest trees,
 Swept by the balmy summer breeze,
 The purple mountains rise;
 Veiled 'neath the mist's bright silv'ry wreath,
 Their summits mock the earth beneath,
 And greet the distant skies.

5.

The clock from out the belfry tower
 Proclaims to all that now the hour
 Of prayer must close the day;
 And through the quaint old castle hall,
 Where the night shadows dimly fall,
 The echo dies away.

6.

An aged Priest yet lingers there,
 And by his side the youthful heir
 Of Nevill's lordly race.
 The moonbeams cast their radiance now
 On Rupert's fair, but troubled brow,
 And o'er the monk's pale face,

7.

A bolder youth than Rupert ne'er
 Slew the wild boar, nor chased the deer
 O'er valley, hill, and dale;
 But now the blanched and pallid cheek,
 The anxious eye, all seem to speak
 Some strange unwonted tale.

8.

"Father, one night I could not keep
My eyes from closing fast in sleep,
Though 'twas the hour of prayer;
So in the chapel I awoke,
Just as dread midnight's first deep stroke
Fell on my startled ear.

9.

"To you I own some awe I felt;
So on my knees I gently knelt,
Our Lady's help to crave,
And prayed—'Oh! may I ever be
A true and faithful son to thee,
A knight both good and brave.'

10.

"But, lo! at that dread hour of night
From the sacristy shone a light,
That burnt both clear and strong;
And then a Priest, all robed for Mass,
I saw with pious footstep pass
The silent aisle along.

11.

"He trod the Lady Chapel fair,
Devoutly lit the tapers there,
Then turned him sadly round—
'Will no one serve my Mass to-night,
For I, before the morning light,
Must leave this sacred ground?'

12.

"At that sad voice a sudden thrill
Sent through my veins an icy chill;
And then no more I knew
Till the bright beams of early dawn,
While calling forth another morn,
Their rays around me threw.

13.

" And yet once more, ere dawn of light,
 I saw that strange nocturnal sight
 Enacted o'er again.
 For, in the chapel, till the hour
 Of midnight, pealed from out the tower,
 In slumber I had lain.

14.

" I strive to think that 'twas a dream,
 But oft at midnight hour I seem
 To hear that sad request.
 That mournful voice doth ever say—
 Will no one serve my Mass to day?—
 Will none do my behest?"

15.

" My son, so strange the tale you tell,
 That I myself would deem it well
 For both of us to stay
 Within the Chapel, till the dawn
 Shall usher in another morn,
 And chase night's shade away.

16.

And should the Priest once more be there,
 Reject not thou again his prayer;
 But, go and serve the Mass.
 And in the Chapel I will be,
 That we may both together see
 What yet may come to pass."

17.

The hours toll forth another day,
 But, ere the last notes die away,
 Before the altar rail,
 Vested in black, the Priest stands there,
 With anxious eye and mournful air,
 And face all wan and pale.

18.

"Will no one serve my Mass to-night?"
Yes; there, within the taper's light,
The fair young Baron knelt.
And piously the Mass he served;
But, yet, his heart was all unnerved
With the dread awe he felt.

19.

The Mass is o'er, but, where is now—
The Priest? whose pale, unearthly brow
Filled Rupert's heart with fear.
An Angel form kneels in his place.
Whose seraph brow bears not a trace
Of him, who erst knelt there.

20.

No earthly gems were half so bright,
As those that shed their dazzling light—
O'er that reprobate brow.
While the pure light that fills the eye,
Seems brighter than the eastern sky,
At dawn's first golden glow.

21.

And when his voice falls on the air,
Its silvery cadence seems to bear
The soul from earth away.
"Oh! Walter, thou hast set me free,
And my enfranchised soul may see
God's own eternal day.

22.

Ere I had passed from earth's vain strife,
Or lain aside the coil of life,
I promised once to say
A Mass for one whose soul had fled,—
Who numbered with the silent dead,—
Had passed from earth away.

23.

But with that Mass unaid I died,
By God's unerring justice tried,
Went forth the sage decree:
'Till I this Mass should say at night,
Or ere the dawn of morning light.
My soul might not be free."

24.

Like wreath of silv'ry incense rare,
The spirit floated on the air,
Then faded from the sight.
But, until dawn's first golden ray,
The Priest and Rupert stayed to pray,
Throughout that wondrous night.

Amid a burst of admiration from the children, Esther now entered, gently chiding them for the length of time they had kept Ruth with them. She was assured, however, by each of the culprits that aunt Ruth's stories were so very pretty, that they could not let her leave them till she had finished.

Naturally timid and reserved, the young girl shrunk back abashed when she ascertained from Esther, that she had been some little time at the half-opened door. Sisters as they were, too,—at least, daughters of the same father,—nevertheless, on account of the vast disparity in their ages, Ruth could not bring herself to regard Esther's relationship to her in its true light. There was something so tender and matronly, withal, in the affectionate greeting with which she had been welcomed, that she positively, almost, envied the little ones around her the privilege they possessed of addressing Esther as their mother; and when, with her arm passed fondly around the waist of this neglected young sister, the latter led her through the long gallery on her way to the library, having first dismissed to their nurse's care the younger members of her family, she

hazarded the question—"Have you been in the habit of composing, Ruth?" It was to her no small wonderment that the girl replied naively and with the greatest simplicity,—

"Why, you see, Miriam and Lucy are not domestic, so that I have been ma'ma's only help, and have literally had no time left for anything; from early in the morning till late in the evening not a moment has been at my disposal; though I must tell you, before the birth of the last two children my services were not so much required, and then I was very often with grandmamma, and used to read some books full of legends to amuse my lighter moments, and I should be very ignorant but for those happy days. But she had, you know, a well-stocked book-case, and each day I devoted a certain portion of my time to study and to languages; and it was when she first became ill that, seeking to amuse her, and feeling as though a moment of inspiration were given me, I clothed in the language of poesy, thoughts which crowded thick and fast upon my mind; they thronged unbidden on me in the wakeful hours of the night,—those hours once so sad to me when I first found I was not loved because my face is plain; and so it came to pass that I found such resource in myself that I no longer envied Lucy and Miriam the superior advantages they possessed, for I never feel dull or weary.."

"And does my father know you possess this gift, Ruth," said Esther, inwardly shocked at ascertaining the position the poor neglected girl held in her family.

"Yes," said Ruth, with a blush and a sigh at the same time, but he thought it was not good to become dreamy and imaginative, and he bade me destroy a poem I had committed to paper."

"Poor prosaic father," thought Esther to herself, as she entered the library with her half-sister; "even this little re-

lief which your neglected child found in the exercise of her own talents was to be taken from her. However, we shall see. I do think I shall keep Ruth at Riversdale."

Something whimsical and almost ludicrous there was in the constrained manner with which the young girl regarded her half-sister, no less than the worthy good-tempered Admiral, and with some pain Esther observed that, with the sweet Madeleine so soon about to leave her home, and with the children only did Ruth appear free and unconstrained. Her amiable nature, too, was greatly shocked, for she could not but be aware that it was the early discipline she had undergone that had occasioned it, and felt certain that, in her own family, poor Ruth had ever been the slave of an unnatural mother and sisters.

A few days later, and, amid the regret of the entire household, the eldest daughter bade adieu to Riversdale ; and as soon as the first anguish of parting was over, Esther employed herself in the study of the character of her new inmate, discovering ere long that the plain, homely casket enshrined a pure and rich treasure. Gradually the poor girl became accustomed to the delightful strangeness of her new position, and could stand beside her fair relatives, note her swart complexion, her harsh unpleasing features, her ungainly figure, void of female beauty or grace, and yet, no sigh of wounded self-love would escape her as heretofore.

But the time approached when the Admiral would have to leave home on active service, taking with him Lucy's unmanageable elder son, Reuben, for, ever wishful to aid his wife's family, he had consented to put him forward in the naval profession. He was a choice specimen in his way ; and, on the evening of his arrival, his first words to his sister both disgusted and shocked Esther, and shewed *how* her step-mother

had brought up her family; for, seizing her roughly by the shoulder, he looked her rudely in the face, exclaiming,—

“ Why, Ruth, old girl, I declare you are as ugly as ever; the air of Riversdale has not made you more beautiful, it seems. Why, ——.”

“ I do not allow such language here, Reuben,” replied Esther, “ either in presence of my own children, or to Ruth. I shall not suffer her to be addressed in such a way, I assure you.”

“ Why, I declare, Ruth will get quite spoiled,” said the unmannered cub. “ I am used to speak so to her; every one did so when she was at home. And do you know, ma’mma says it is a great shame she is let stop here at Riversdale leading a lazy life, and playing the fine lady, and leaving her sisters to nurse baby, and do all her work.”

“ Silence, sir, and keep such remarks to yourself,” said the Admiral, who had just entered the room, the youth, quite unabashed, continuing the tirade, nothing awed by the presence of the latter.

It was quite clear, however, that Ruth had been shamefully used by all her family, and Esther thankfully accepted her husband’s permission to offer a permanent home at Riversdale to her unlucky little half-sister, an offer which the Deacon accepted with much heartfelt delight, and for which he was profuse in his thanks.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

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Again there is a break in our narrative, for seven years have passed away, bearing in their passage, as far as regarded the lives of our principal characters, but very little to interest the reader.

Not now to the fair vales of Devon,—not to Lucy's former luxurious home at the Oaklands,—or, even to the pretty cottage in which we last saw her established, do we conduct the patient reader who has perused our pages; but, turn with us to the purlieus of the low and obscure parts of Westminster, for, in one of those mean streets, in a sordid habitation kept by a poor mechanic, the fastidious and elegant, but misguided Lucy has taken up what she at the moment meant to be but a temporary abode.

What has been the end in her regard?—and she is but a unit amongst thousands of her sex of this sad practise of marrying without oneness of principle—this *marriage de convenance*. What, but that at the end of four-and-twenty long years, when her two elder daughters have themselves married, and she has grown up sons, this guilty woman, over whose head some forty-four years have passed, and whose brow is furrowed, more, after all, by her own ungoverned passions, than by years, this victim of a misplaced attachment, after a stormy scene with the father of her children, madly rushed

from the shelter of his roof, took with her a few trinkets, on the proceeds of which she lived for some time in more decent lodgings, and then, when her last shilling was changed, sought out this obscure abode.

She sinks from illness, and she knows it to be illness of no ordinary kind under which she labors. She fancies she is dying, yet, that proud nature will never yield, for she would die by the road-side ere she would sue for the forgiveness of her injured husband, or pen one word to the good and innocent Esther. And what of her children?—what of Lucy and Miriam—those favored ones for whom she has sinned? Why, Lucy's husband was a wealthy stock-broker; for six years of wedded life she abounded in this world's goods, but a reverse was at hand, and selfish and unfeeling as the mother in whose steps she too faithfully trod, she but reproaches her with her mad folly in leaving her father's home, sends no assistance, nor turns her steps to her mother's miserable home. As to Miriam, she is far away beneath the burning suns of India. Truly, this woman had sown the whirlwind, and it were but well that she should reap the storm. She had but one thought, her weak, vapid mind could cling but to that one. Her one wish was, to see her spoiled favorites united to wealthy men; and thus it was that, eager to gain her point, she could not, even, resolve to wait till the girls had ripened into women, but, exulted in the cleverness she had displayed, and was known to have said—that one daughter dedicated to celibacy would be enough, and that one should be her ugly Ruth.

The night is stormy, and the wind howls in fitful gusts as it sweeps by the water-side and round by the dull, dark, dirty street in which Lucy lives; the old casement shakes; and she shivers, as her slender, thinly-clad form cowers over the decaying embers of the miserable fire now fast expiring.

"Night comes again," she feebly murmurs, "and what if I should not live to see another morning?—what if I were to die alone, uncared for, for a mortal stupor appears to creep over this languid frame? Well, well, 'twere better done at once, whilst yet there is time."

Then rising from her chair, Lucy essayed to cross the room, but her feeble limbs refused to support her, and, overpowered by illness, long fasting, and bodily weakness, she sank prostrate on the ground, and fell into a heavy swoon.

The cold, grey light of the winter morning beamed faintly through the casement windows of her miserable chamber, ere the charitable efforts of the good woman of the house, who had been aroused from her early rest by the noise occasioned by Lucy's fall, were partially available in restoring her to consciousness; for her poverty deprived her of having at hand the restoratives usually employed in such cases. Mary Murphy had, too, made a discovery which, genuine native of the Emerald Isle as she was, warmed her heart at once to her unhappy lodger; for, on loosening Lucy's dress, she discovered a small crucifix which she wore around her neck, and which told the worthy woman at once that her lodger was, doubtless, a member of her own faith.

At length Lucy shewed signs of returning consciousness, and found herself supported in the arms of the poor woman, who was endeavouring to force between her lips sundry pieces of bread soaked in brandy, the stimulating effects of which soon made themselves visible in her gradual recovery.

"Alack, poor thing, sure, and it is very ill ye've been, so that I thought the life of ye was going; but the blessed God has restored you a little, darling. And would it not be better to send at once for the priest as well as the doctor, in case its worse ye should get, and ——."

A cold shiver ran through Lucy's frame, and she had scarce feebly articulated the words—

"Yes—yes—I wish to see," when she again fell back in the arms of the poor woman. Her form became cold and rigid; and, struck with horror, believing her to be dying, the latter gently deposited her on her miserable bed, and hastening from the room, despatched her husband in quest both of a priest and a medical attendant.

The former, a venerable old man, whose head was silvered with the snows of eighty winters, was the first who made his appearance.

Father St. Aubyn's was a green old age, his tall form yet unbent by the weight of years. There was, perhaps, a something of sternness in that grave and, withal, noble countenance; yet, this apparent severity of expression disappeared the moment you conversed with him; and few were known to remain obdurate when they came within reach of his influence.

All unprepared, however, was the worthy priest for the shock which awaited him. Still, pale, and motionless, a faint pulsation alone shewing that life had not entirely gone, the form of the unhappy and guilty Mrs. Ashley lay extended on the bed; and a thrill of horror crept through the frame of the clergyman as he gazed on features too well known to him, features which still bore traces of their former beauty, and which once seen were not of a cast likely to be easily forgotten.

"Fetch me some wine immediately," said the priest, giving the woman some money as he spoke; for a slight movement made by the invalid told him that returning consciousness was at hand, and he trembled lest death should snatch the soul away and render the ministrations of religion fruitless;

nor was he wholly without fear lest his own presence might occasion a new shock.

Woful scandal had Lucy's flight from her husband's home created. *How* little had the worthy priest deemed that, on his taking up a permanent home in London, his steps would be directed to the wretched abode of the misguided Lucy.

With his own hands he poured between her lips in small quantities the wine, first taking the precaution to dismiss Mrs. Murphy ; and when at length she opened her eyes, in the dim light of the small candle placed on the mantel-shelf, Lucy naturally conjectured that she was receiving the aid of a physician ; but the words—

"I hope you are better, Mrs. Ashley," sounded on her ear, in tones she indistinctly remembered to have heard before. She pressed her hand to her brow, as if striving to remember when and where she had heard that voice ; and then there came back, thronging thick and fast upon her mind, events and scenes in which she had mingled long, long years since, in the days of girlhood and early youth,—those guileless days in which she harboured in her mind no accursed thirst for money and position, by which her happiness in after life was marred ; and raising her eyes to the countenance of the priest, she gazed thereon, half wishful that the idea that possessed her mind were but the weak chimera of her disordered fancy. But, no ;—calmly, nay, lovingly, those keen dark eyes were fixed on her's ; she knew that it was her old friend who had sought her out in this abode of penury, who was aware of the depth of her punishment and degradation ; and, for a few moments, self-love had its way ; and, covering her face with her wasted hands, large tears rained down her cheeks, and she murmured—" Oh ! Mr. St. Aubyn, I cannot bear to speak

to you ;—to think that *you* should see me thus,—that *you* should have been brought to me instead of a stranger."

"Poor child, poor child," exclaimed the good pastor, using still the endearing appellative of earlier years; "why would you wish to deprive me of the happiness of receiving back one for whose conversion I have so often prayed? Nay, cast these thoughts aside, Lucy, and speak to me again, as you have not spoken for twenty-six long years."

"And *he* then is destined by Providence to receive the confession of my mis-spent life," thought Lucy, as one by one those dark sins she had trod lightly, as the most venial offences, beneath her feet, now rose before her in vivid distinctness in all their horror,—her greed of wealth—her abandonment of her religious principles—her *marriage de convenance*—the shameful preference she had given to all her children over Ruth—and, pre-eminent above all, the mortal stain upon her soul, whereby she had, in thought at least, violated her plighted faith to her husband. For a moment the unhappy woman faltered, but she was conscious death was at hand; and, ——. But here our narration must be broken; for, the many wanderings of the penitent soul, poured forth under the inviolable seal of the confessional, are known alone to God and the confessor.

And ere the holy words of absolution were pronounced, Lucy, whose broken spirit was humbled to the very dust, had empowered the priest in her name to write to her husband, begging his forgiveness, and had also commissioned him to send for Ruth and Esther. Oh! miracle of grace!—one prodigy out of thousands daily worked in the sacred tribunal of confession, in which poor human nature, blinded by self-love, sits not in self-judgment.

Scarcely had all been concluded when a medical gentleman

attended, and the result of his visit was such, that the priest, considering Lucy's case as hopeless, administered the Holy Sacrament as Viaticum, also, Extreme Unction, and promised to write immediately both to Mr. Ashley and to Ruth; then placing a sum of money in the hands of the worthy Mrs. Murphy, he requested her to make the wretched room as comfortable as possible, and procure all that might be required, and telling her he would return after the lapse of a few hours, to see if there were any change for the better, he took his leave.

But the hours waned away till mid-day was at hand, and when again the Father St. Aubyn stood beside Lucy, she had fallen into a species of lethargy, in which she remained buried for some time, perfectly unconscious of those around her; and, in such a stupor, it was the conviction of the medical gentleman she would expire.

The hazy light of the wintry afternoon was fast fading away, when the but yet half-conscious Mrs. Ashley was aware of the sound of carriage-wheels in the street beneath, the quietude of which was rarely interrupted, save by the noise of the children of the various families, who were closely huddled together in that densely crowded and poor locality.

But, had she relapsed again into a dreamy lethargy? or, was it really Esther, who, with still fair face, bent over that wretched bed, and dropped a hot tear on her brow, so cold and clammy that she thought the dews of death might already have settled there?—then striving to rouse herself from this dreadful stupor, she became conscious that another form was also there, its oval countenance lighted by a pair of flashing eyes, redeemed from the charge of boldness of expression they might otherwise have incurred, by the long dark lashes by which they were shaded; the whole contour was that of a

beautiful brunette ; the figure, no longer that—for our readers will surely recognise our old friend, Ruth—of an ill-formed, ungainly girl ; but, as is not unfrequently the case, had belied the promise of its earlier years, and the ill-favored girl had merged, both in face and figure, if not into a correctly beautiful, nevertheless, a certainly handsome woman.

But the old expression was there still, and as the eyes of the poor penitent mother, sick even unto death, met those of her child, whose tears fell thick and fast upon her pallid face, the words—“Ruth, my child, forgive me,” broke forth and died upon her trembling lips ; and again that lethargy, the precursor of death, stole over her frame, and for the space of the next hour she was unconscious of the presence of the two sisters, whose eyes had taken in on their first entrance a painful survey of the wasted form and haggard face of the once beautiful Lucy, and the miserable attic, and wretched bed on which she lay.

“Papa will be so shocked to see your mother in such a place, Ruth, dear,” said the elder sister ; “yet, I much fear her sad state will forbid removal. But hark, I hear the footstep of the woman whom that kind-hearted priest deputed to attend her ; and I fancy I hear, too, his own voice on the stairs without.”

As Esther thus spoke she gently crossed the room, and opening the door admitted Mrs. Murphy and the priest, followed by the medical attendant, who administered a powerful stimulant ; and after the lapse of a few minutes, that state of lethargy slowly passed away.

Calmly quiet, then, lay the unhappy Lucy ; at last—to the unspeakable joy of those around her—perfectly conscious ; her gaze never scarce for a moment removed from the person

of Ruth ; and at length signing to her to approach, she feebly whispered, in accents of the deepest contrition,—

“ I would see your father, Ruth, like yourself and Esther ; love, he has much to forget and forgive.”

“ I have sent for Mr. Ashley,” said the priest, “ and doubt not but that he will be here to-night ; meanwhile, keep yourself perfectly quiet, and if you pass a good night, there may even be a chance of removal to some quiet, respectable lodging. And as I have invited your husband to my residence, in order that I may break to him the real state of your health, and the condition of the place in which you are at present living, I will not remain longer with you, but hope to return later in his company.”

Thus speaking, the clergyman withdrew, and the two half-sisters were left alone with the invalid, whose admiring gaze was ever and anon fixed on the face and form of her child, with a bitter recollection gnawing at her heart, as she thought over her past unnatural conduct. And as these old remembrances welled up in her heart, tears rushed to her eyes, the sight of which gave no small uneasiness to those who watched beside her couch ; for they were accompanied by words of penitence and sorrow—expressions of humility and regret for wrongs done to each, which the two sisters would fain have been excused listening to.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The clock at the old Abbey had boomed forth the hour of ten, and the worthy priest still anxiously awaited the arrival of the once great Mr. Ashley,—the formerly rich Deacon

whose marriage with Lucy Clifton he had so grieved at in years long passed away. Again and again he had replenished the fire, and looked around to see if the refreshments he had ordered for his expected guest were all at hand, and had sat long musing on the mutability of everything earthly, trying to call back to his mind's eye the fair, girlish Lucy, and contrasting the form and face he had thus conjured up with that of the haggard, wasted, worn woman of fashion, who had imperilled her all for mammon ; and a hearty thanksgiving for the repentance of the wanderer yet hung on the lips of the good ecclesiastic, when a sharp rat-tat was heard at the door, and the next moment our old friend the Deacon—no longer bearing a portly form and a rubicund countenance, but thin and spare, and his face furrowed by anxiety and care—stood in the presence of the priest.

"My wife, sir,—where is my wife ?" were the only words the agitated wretched man could utter, as he stood with the parlour door still in his hand, and pushed aside the chair the priest placed beside him.

"Calm your excitement, Mr. Ashley," said the former, "your wife is in good hands ; your daughters, Mrs. Seymour and Ruth, have been with her for several hours. You must be perfectly calm when you present yourself before her, or her death may at once ensue. So for one short half hour I insist on your being my guest, and partaking of such poor refreshment as you see before you ; after which, should you feel yourself perfectly composed, we will together pay a visit to Mrs. Ashley, who is very contrite for all that has passed, knows that she is dying, and seeks your forgiveness."

"Mr. St. Aubyn," said the Deacon, rising, and with some emotion extending his hand to the priest, "you have known my unhappy wife from her childhood ; truly, heartily, have I

ever loved her, yet, was not the day a luckless one in which she united her fate with mine. I wooed her for her beauty, forgetful that after I had won her, I should long for something more than a pretty face, foolishly fancying, too, that the daughter of a Catholic would fall in with the more rigid views of a Dissenting husband, whilst she (and herein consists my sharpest grief, reverend sir,) married me for my wealth alone, for, ere the first six months of our wedded life had expired, I felt convinced her heart was as a sealed book to me. I have lived to see my error in forming a union in which there could be no congeniality of sentiment, and am assured Lucy has done the same. But, take me to her, my good sir," he added. "Every moment is an age till I rescue her from the condition in which she has thrown herself."

"In five minutes we will leave this house, Mr. Ashley," replied the worthy priest; "meanwhile, let me beg of you to pass that short time in partaking of some refreshment."

Thus speaking, he poured out a cup of strong tea—a grateful beverage on a cold night, placed cold fowl and ham before his guest, and left him, not unwilling, to escape the sight of the emotion of the man whom he remembered at Torquay, under circumstances so very different to those in which they now met.

CHAPTER XXX.

The priest purposely lengthened the short time he had mentioned to ten minutes, in order that the Deacon should partake of some refreshment. What was his vexation, then, on his return, to see that his hospitable intentions had been

frustrated by the anxiety of the latter to see his wife, an anxiety, indeed, fast becoming insupportable. Pitying, then, his evident distress, he at once set out on their expedition, and in less than a quarter of an hour they arrived at the obscure street in which Lucy resided. The priest observed the shudder which Ashley could not repress as the poor woman of the house lighted them up the narrow staircase, and the next moment, the bed-room door being cautiously opened by the priest, the Deacon stood within the room himself for the space of two or three sad minutes, an unobserved spectator of the scene.

For a moment the priest only was noticed, for Ashley still stood within the shade of the door, but his quick ear caught the words—"My husband," whispered by Lucy in a tone of enquiry, as Father St. Aubyn approached her bed. The poor Deacon could not longer repress his emotion, but, regardless of the consequences, hastened forwards. The well-known step sounded on the ear of Lucy ere she beheld him. He was conscious that Esther and Ruth caught him, one by either hand, uttering the words—"Dear father," in tones of glad delight; that his wife—pale, attenuated, but beautiful even while the grey shadow of death was passing over her countenance—raised herself on her elbow, pressed her hands on her heart, then clasped them together, raising her eyes to his with a look as if deprecating reproach, and uttering no words but—

"My husband, forgive me," sank on his shoulder.

"Think not of the past, Lucy, it is forgotten and forgiven," said the Deacon. "We have now only to think of your removal from such a place as this;" and as the poor Deacon spoke he cast a shuddering glance around the wretched room.

Removal, aye, removal, indeed, Deacon Ashley ; and thus he felt as he spoke, even whilst he strove to banish the unwelcome thought, that the removal would shortly be, as to the body, to the long dark home—the grave ; for that the soul was about to wing its way across the vast ocean of eternity. “But, will it be so soon ?” was the question he asked himself ; —“will she live two, three, four days ?—am I to endure the horror of seeing her die in such a place as this ?”—then, turning aside, he whispered to the priest,—

“Is there apprehension of immediate death ? or, is this state of lethargy likely to continue some days longer ?”

“The physician’s opinion is,” replied the priest, “that Mrs. Ashley may with care and a quiet mind probably linger some few days, perhaps even a week longer ; also, that it is very desirable to remove her from this horrible abode, though at the same time, there is a doubt existing in his mind as to whether she can, in so weak a state, bear removal.”

The poor Deacon’s agitation increased as the clergyman concluded his remark, and the latter observing it, urged him to accept a bed in his house for the night, and early on the following morning seek an hour’s conversation with the physician.

But poor Mr. Ashley would by no means accept the proffered hospitality of the worthy priest, but determined to share the watch of his two daughters, being proof against all their remonstrances to the contrary, and the priest was fain to depart alone.

In good truth, all Lucy’s delinquencies, not to say her very great faults, were forgotten by the loving ones who now sat beside her bed, and whose greatest uneasiness arose from their inability to check the bitter words of self-reproach and self-accusation which ever and anon rose to her lips, combined

with the humiliating terms in which the unhappy but truly repentent woman freely declared her faults, and besought their forgiveness; so that at length the poor Deacon and Ruth declared they must at once leave her alone with Esther if she again pained herself and them by thus bitterly recurring to the past.

We need scarcely add, that very early on the following morning Mr. Ashley presented himself at the residence of the physician under whose care the priest had placed his wife, and shocked, indeed, was he to find his worst apprehensions realised; for the latter gave it as his opinion that she would in all human probability not survive beyond a week or two at longest,—that her case was hopeless; but that, at the same time, as it was very desirable for the comfort, nay, the positive well-being of Mrs. Ashley during the short period she might yet live, as well as for the feelings of her relatives, that she should be removed to some respectable quiet place, it was determined to take steps to that effect that very day, and, having accepted the physician's offer of breakfast at his house, the Deacon sallied forth in quest of respectable apartments.

The idea of removal to Riversdale had been adopted, but speedily abandoned as impracticable, on account of the distance; therefore, the Deacon had no choice but to turn his steps in a westerly direction, and finally engaged large and commodious rooms for himself, his daughters, and his dying wife, in one of the many quiet old-fashioned streets contiguous to the squares, whose former glories have been of late years eclipsed by the more modern locality of Belgravia.

In the strictest sense of the word, the term *poor* could scarcely be applied to the Deacon, inasmuch as the necessaries of life were always within his reach, consequently, the misguided, undisciplined Lucy had never known poverty in its

real horror, however bitterly, when contrasted with her former affluence, she might have felt it in a relative sense. Notwithstanding apartments at the West End are not to be had cheaply, and the kind-hearted Esther foreseeing her father's dilemma, had whispered him that she would defray all the expense herself; with one cause of annoyance off his mind then, the Deacon returned with the satisfactory intelligence that his search had been successful; for, uncurtailed in his offer through Esther's kindness, he had been able to pay the exorbitant sum required ere he could get permission to bring his dying wife thither; and he prepared with all speed, aided by his daughters, to remove her from the abode into which her own ungovernable anger and pride had at last contributed to cast her. It was with a feeling of exquisite relief that the little trio then beheld the pale, emaciated form borne into the carriage which awaited to receive her, for it was with no small horror that they had contemplated her death in such a spot as that they had but now quitted.

A few days alternating between hope and fear then ensued,—days of quiet though sad recollection of the unrecallable past to Lucy,—of a soothing remembrance to the poor Deacon, that, though the prejudices of his early training and the stricter tenets of his sect had constrained him to war with Lucy's own ideas, still, he had on all other points allowed her unlimited indulgence, had ever been a fond and faithful husband,—to Esther, along with the deepest sympathy for her father, and sorrow for Lucy, came the reflection that, under very trying circumstances, she had nobly done her duty,—to Ruth, the sweet consciousness that, though her claim to maternal affection was not, indeed, recognised till the shadow of death hovered over her mother, yet, late as it was, the love for which she had so often yearned was now all her own.

And so it was that the days passed on till the Sunday evening approached,—that last evening, the rising of whose setting sun Lucy was never more to behold. The Dissenter husband had strangely unbent, throughout the day they had noted that strange restlessness which so often precedes dissolution, and towards night there were unmistakable evidences of approaching death. Wishful to obtain all the consolation the Catholic Church extends to her dying members, Esther immediately dispatched a messenger to Father St. Aubyn, and the Deacon watched with some surprise the movements of Ruth, whose tears flowed copiously whilst she fitted up a table as a temporary altar for the reception of the Holy Eucharist, laying thereon a cloth of snowy linen, then she duly placed a pair of wax candles in silver candlesticks; and as the hot-house at Riversdale was far away, and could not be plundered of its sweets, she contented herself with sprigs of green holly interspersed with the bright scarlet berry, and not forgetting a richly-sculptured crucifix which Esther always carried about with her; she returned to the couch of her dying mother, beside which she knelt, buried with the latter in deep and earnest prayer, for they saw the hard death-agony was at hand.

Very shortly the good priest arrived, and for a few moments the dying woman remained alone with the confessor, then the Deacon and his daughters, at a given signal of the priest, returned; and, impelled by an irresistible influence, Deacon Ashley knelt and prayed beside his daughter, whilst the Holy Eucharist, in form of Viaticum, was imparted, agreeably to the forms prescribed by the Roman Ritual. The last absolution—*in articulo mortis*—having been pronounced, and Father St. Aubyn perceiving that the last moment was at hand, he proceeded with the prayers for the agonizing. The

scene was rendered doubly impressive by the silence that reigned around, unbroken, save by the low voice of the priest, for the stillness of the Sabbath evening was complete, the sound of the last bell had died away, and all was silence in the large old-fashioned street beneath.

Very, very sad it is to the survivor for the spirit to pass suddenly away,—to hear no parting word,—to receive no last embrace ; but yet, would we not all forego cheerfully this sad consolation rather than witness that sore death struggle. Long and hard was that of the poor fragile form now agonizing before her pitying friends, ever and anon words of supplication and accents of prayer issuing from the pallid lips, whilst Esther wiped away the heavy death-dews which gathered on the still beautiful countenance.

And at length the shades of night had fallen, and the struggle grew less violent ; a sweet peace reigned in the soul of the penitent woman ; she was perfectly conscious ; embraced those loved all too late who knelt around her bed ; whispered words of gratitude to the aged priest, from whose teaching she had turned in her riper years ; and, fixing her glazed eyes on the crucifix, the words—“ Into Thy hands I commend my spirit,” rose to her lips, but the first three only were audible ; the last sigh of expiring nature broke on the ears of those around, and with that sigh, the soul of the penitent Lucy had escaped from its mortal coil.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The bright rays of the wintry sun gleamed cheerily on the library windows at Riversdale, and the hoar frost which hung

over every tree and shrub in the noble park in which the mansion stood, sparkled like diamonds, as its rays shone on the clustering wreaths of leafless branches, whilst the blue sky above was unspeckled by a single cloud.

In the library a small party were assembled, composed of the Admiral, Esther, and her second daughter, Augusta, also, Mr. Ashley and Ruth.

"And you really will not prolong your stay with us beyond the present month; and I am to understand, my dear sir, that you positively decline to make our home your own," said the Admiral to his father-in-law. "Have you well considered my offer? Here you will have the society of both Esther and Ruth; if you leave Riversdale you can have but Ruth alone, and we shall sorely miss her society. Moreover, though Nutley is a pretty little place enough, and only five miles from the park, so that we may meet frequently, still, it cannot boast of the comfort I could afford you at Riversdale, and ____."

"Not another word, my dear Seymour," interrupted the Deacon. "Nutley, which your kindness has placed at my disposal, is a charming little place, better than need be, if it come to that, for a worn-out old man like me; and Ruth will be my housekeeper until the time come," he continued, with a scarcely perceptible sigh, "when, perchance, she may look around for a younger protector than her old father. Oh! rest assured, my dear Everard," he continued, "there will be happy days in store for me at Nutley; it is a sweet little retreat, and just near enough to Esther and to you to save me from being at all in your way, or, on the other hand, lonely from want of society."

"I shall feel very sorry," said the Admiral, "in the thought that you persist in leaving Riversdale from any

such idea as that which you have just started, for in our way you can *never* be ; we shall both of us much miss the society of Ruth and yourself."

" Many thanks to you, Seymour, for your generous proffer," said Ashley, pressing the extended hand of his son-in-law ; " but I have always thought the quiet of Nutley would suit me best."

" So I perceived," replied the Admiral ; " so, if you please, you and I, with Esther and Ruth, will ride over and see what state things are in."

As soon, therefore, as the horses were put to the phæton, the little party set off on a pleasant drive of some five or six miles to Nutley, which had been the favorite summer residence of the Admiral in his less prosperous days, when simple Captain Seymour. Situated on a rising ground some little distance from the sea coast, it enjoyed a lovely prospect both of land and sea view, whilst to the left, a richly-wooded country extended for miles around. The white walls of this pleasant villa were in the summer months literally covered with roses and honeysuckles ; everything was compact both within and without. A small garden, stocked with the choicest flowers of each season, with a miniature lawn, extended in front of the house, whilst in the rear of the premises lay a well-stocked fruit and kitchen garden, not forgetting the hen coop, with sundry other out-houses for one cow, a couple of pigs, and stabling for a fine bay mare, which the good Admiral insisted on Ruth accepting.

The interior was fitted up simply but with exquisite good taste, nor was a single article wanting for domestic comfort. Here the intelligent Esther had passed the first days of her wedded life, and each apartment bore evidence to the tastes of a highly educated and accomplished woman. A small

room fitted up as a library and music room combined, exhibited on its well-stocked shelves the works of some of the best of our English authors, not, as may be imagined, excluding carefully selected works of fiction, and also, the compositions of several German, French, and Italian authors, all which languages Esther was mistress of, and in which, by her aid, Ruth had become a proficient. Also, there was a breakfast-room and a small drawing-room, which, with three sleeping apartments and servants' rooms, completed the domestic arrangements of the house.

The Deacon looked around in amazement, as proof after proof of his son-in-law's liberality rose before him ; and he experienced an inward feeling of confusion as he remembered a certain scene in the library at the Oaklands, when *he*, the then rich Mr. Ashley, had given him the hand of Esther as a dowerless bride, and called to mind *how* much he now owed that disinterested daughter, and her noble-minded husband.

But the Admiral perceived his emotion with pain, he divined the cause, and strove to stop him, when the Deacon's trembling words of grateful acknowledgment broke forth. Then, turning to Ruth, he exclaimed,—

“ This little property, Ruth, is for the sole use of yourself and your father, while his life is spared ; and I am about to execute a deed, which, after his death, makes you its mistress. With the small sum which will then revert to you, you will thus, should you remain unmarried, be able to live in that elegant retirement and peace, which those who love you would wish to see you occupy.”

Our readers may imagine what were the feelings of Ruth, as the noble-hearted, generous Admiral thus spoke. Ruth could not repress her tears, and Esther, in the deep-

est recesses of her own heart, returned thanks to the Almighty for having united her fate with that of a man of such inestimable worth.

We have little more to say, save that early in the following week Ruth and her father settled down in their happy little home. As to the other children of the Deacon, we have nothing good to tell. Seldom can it be that from unions so uncongenial as that of Reuben Ashley and Lucy aught but contradictory opinions and disparity of sentiment springs forth; and thus it is that Miriam, Lucy, and the youth, Samuel, have made their start in the world, without any fixed notions as to religious belief, consequently without any counteracting influence to guide or rule their actions—alike ridiculing the strict, straight-laced notions of their Dissenting father, and the wise restraints, and, as they termed them, unnecessary observances of their mother's faith. Ruth was, as it were, snatched from among them; her case being an exemplification of the truth, that from such marriages there may and does occasionally spring forth one who is a model of virtue, of Christian faith and heroism. Nor do we mean at all to controvert the well-known fact, that occasionally “the believing wife converts the unbelieving husband,” and *vice versa*; but the odds are still woefully against the weaker sex, when such marriages are contracted in the ranks of the middling class, and especially amongst those who move in the humbler walks of life—for, unaccustomed to the *bienseance* of the more polished manners of the upper classes, which imposes on its members an at least polite forbearance, this disunion and contradiction of opinion is frequently repaid by a brutality of retaliation unparalleled in any age but that of the present day.

For the conversion of the Deacon, however, Esther and

Ruth never cease to pray, as yet without anything transpiring to strengthen their hope, save that he has given up his Deaconship. He sometimes attends the services of the neighbouring church, or accompanies Ruth to the chapel at Riversdale; and a smile occasionally escapes her as she perceives, that when he goes to the library for a book, that it is not that everlasting Milton and Josephus, but that occasionally a volume of Scott's works is in his hand, or, it may be, Shakspeare or Byron; that if he seeks a work of history, it is not always Hume, but that he has commenced Lingard. Thus Ruth discovers that gradually his early prejudices are softening down; but, whether his will prove one of those cases in which the mind, though apparently willing, yet, does not receive the truth, remains to be yet seen; if so, Ruth may hope that what the Church terms *invincible ignorance* kept her father out of its pale.

And of Ruth what have we more to say? She is yet fresh in womanhood's prime; still, foolish people already jestingly ask—"Is she going to live and die an *old maid*?" She parries their nonsense—(bye and bye they will ask the same question, perchance, more seriously, and with mischievous design,)—by reminding them, that God has given to each one a mission and a vocation,—there is time enough yet."

And so there is, sweet Ruth; and thus it is that she lives on, the constant companion of her old father and Augusta, her favorite niece—Esther's second daughter; nor is there any chance, though Ruth has been known to hint at ever leading a single life, and yet remaining in the world, that that life will become a selfish one, as sometimes is the case. She is far too good and self-denying for that; the poor inhabitants know her for miles around Nutley; the

sick and the aged look on her as their ministering angel ; and Ruth has never thought of marriage yet ; she lives in a little world of her own, an ideal, romantic one it may, perhaps, be, but never mind, so that she be happy. She thinks not of the future, she leaves all that to God, but of the past ; and in her dreams at night, in her waking thoughts by day, ever recurring to her busy mind, comes the remembrance of her dead mother's disappointed ambition—of the fatal end of a *marriage de convenance*.

Esther and the Admiral still live happy as they deserve to be. We had omitted to say that, on the death of Lady Laura Wentworth, the former had come into possession of great part of her ladyship's fortune ; indeed, the estate of Riversdale had been left him by her ; and we have seen by the excellent disposition of the little property at Nutley, how wisely the good Admiral used the talents entrusted to his care.

In bidding our kind readers adieu, we have but to express a hope that all will find a forcibly-pointed moral in our tale, and will own with us, that, in this our day, there are too many marriages like that of Lucy and the Deacon, consequently, that the gilded but heavy yoke becomes insupportable to the wearer, and that where there are not kindred spirits in wedded life, there can be no true happiness ; also, that all of woman born have their own peculiar mission.

This we have endeavoured to exemplify, in the character of our patient, humble little Ruth, who, uncalled either to the cloister or to wedded life, finds her happiness in the—to some ignoble minds—*unhonoured* state of celibacy.

In conclusion, we sincerely trust that both wedded and single will alike be pleased with our Tale of *Wedded Life at the Oaklands*.

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